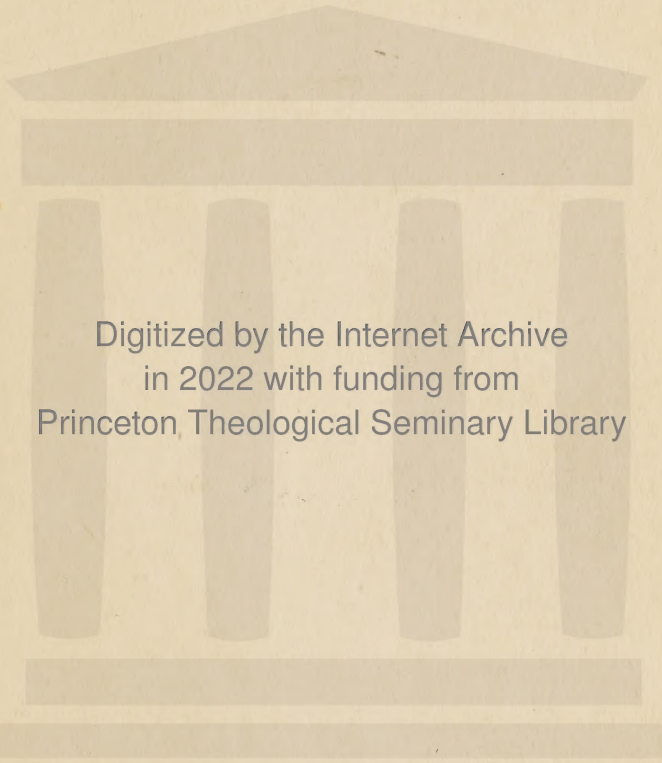


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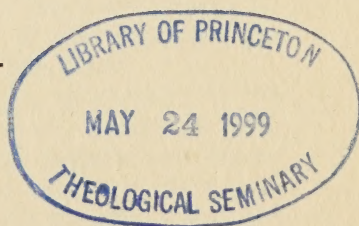
Introduction to the Epistles
and Gospels of the church



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INTRODUCTION
TO THE
EPISTLES AND GOSPELS
OF THE
CHURCH YEAR

BY
HENRY OFFERMANN



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PREFACE

This little book on the EPISTLES and GOSPELS of the CHURCH YEAR is primarily intended for pastors and students, and is designed to be a help in the preparation of the sermon. It owes its life to the writer's work as teacher in the Theological Seminary, but back of its lies a pastor's experience of many years. The book does not aim to take the place of a complete commentary, although it is based upon an exegetical study of the original text. A commentary that gives evidence of sound and solid scholarship, may occasionally help the student to elucidate an obscure passage or to solve a difficult exegetical problem. But the study of commentaries is far less important than the study of Scripture itself. And unless the student learns for himself, by constant study, meditation and prayer, to search the Scriptures and to walk and move with perfect freedom in this beautiful garden of God, commentaries will be of little service to him; they will be crutches rather than guides. The best help in the interpretation of a Scripture lesson, it seems to the writer, is an introduction that will lead the student into the heart of his text, and will show him how to apply the matter of his text to himself and to others. That is substantially what *Bengel* meant by his advice to the student of the New Testament: "*Te totum applica ad textum; rem totam applica ad te.*" It also expresses the writer's first aim in publishing this little book.

Homiletical commentaries often give, in addition to the exegesis of the text, practical suggestions, homiletical hints and sermon outlines. It has been the writer's own experience that such suggestions do not always serve their purpose. The experienced pastor can well dispense with them while the beginner will always have considerable difficulty in adapting himself to forms of thought that have been prepared for him by some one else. Another difficulty

lies in the fact that there is very often no real inner connection between the exegesis of the text and those practical suggestions. Therefore it has been the writer's second aim, not only to point out to the student the principal features of the text, but also to indicate to him how those features can be made fruitful in the preparation of the sermon. In many cases this treatment has resulted in something like an outline. But even where the outline seems to correspond to the rules laid down in Homiletics, the writer has endeavored to avoid rigidly fixed forms which would not admit of any shaping and molding, and to which the student would have to adhere under all circumstances. It was the writer's intention to build a bridge that leads from the text to the sermon; but it was not his aim to build a bridge that could be used as a *pons asinorum*.

The reader may notice that the treatment of the lessons is not always the same: some have been treated more fully than others. In most cases, however, this lack of uniformity is explained by the different character of the lessons themselves. When a lesson is comparatively brief and easy, the writer has not deemed it necessary to explain things that need no explanation, but has contented himself with calling attention to the most important points. On the other hand, whenever a text seemed to present certain difficulties that might be removed by closer analysis or by examining the context, a fuller treatment has been given. And as this latter class of texts is found more frequently among the EPISTLES than among the GOSPELS, the reader will observe that, as a rule, the remarks on the EPISTLES occupy a larger space than those on the GOSPELS. Besides, there is an abundance of homiletical material on the GOSPELS, while the material on the EPISTLES is rather scanty.

Underlying the entire work is the writer's deep conviction that the Christian pulpit is primarily the place, not to discuss social, political and moral issues of the day, but to present to the congregation the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ is not a society of ethical culture, but the congregation of believers. She is

called and commissioned to bear witness to the truth, to seek and save that which is lost, to preach the Law and the Gospel, repentance and faith, and thereby to promote the Kingdom of God and to hasten the day of the coming of her divine Lord. This must not be interpreted as if the Church had nothing to do with the things pertaining to this world. On the contrary; but what it means is this: The more clearly the Church understands her own specific mission, to preach the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, the more effectively will she be able to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. There is in our days a demand for "a social Gospel." If that is understood in the sense that the Church has a duty to society as well as to the individual, that she must have courage to raise her voice against intolerable conditions in modern social and economic life, that she must preach righteousness and justice, love and mercy, sincerity and truth, as the principles by which nations as well as individuals should be guided in their mutual relations to each other, then we can most heartily agree with it. But if it means that in place of the Gospel which Paul and the other Apostles proclaimed, another Gospel is to be substituted in which there is no room for the cross of Christ, for His atoning death and resurrection, for sin and grace, for repentance and faith, for the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming the lives of men, for a love that is kindled by the love of Christ, and for a hope that reaches out into the world of unseen realities, then we must decline such a Gospel as neither in accord with the Gospel of Paul nor with the Gospel of Jesus Himself.

There is another thought that suggests itself in this connection. We are "the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1). Very few of us can speak with authority on questions of the day. But we can, and we certainly must, speak with authority on the things which God has revealed to us in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Even a young minister, who has had very little experience, can speak with authority if all his preaching and teaching is firmly grounded in the Word of God.

But this presupposes that he knows the Word of God so that he is able to expound it. It also presupposes that he understands the particular lesson of his text. Homiletics, the theory of preaching, teaches him how to build his sermon. But the very first requirement is a thorough study of the text itself. It is one of the weaknesses of the modern sermon that the text is too often used only as a motto, or as a starting point for all sorts of rhetorical flights. Consequently, much of our preaching today lacks positiveness; it lacks that note of certainty which enables the preacher to say with regard to his sermon: *Haec dixit Dominus*. A sermon may be brilliant and thoughtful; it may fairly bristle with quotations from modern writers; but unless it sets forth in clear language the message which the text conveys to the readers, it falls short of its mark. The congregation is always at the mercy of the preacher: it may be stimulated to momentary thought and action; but it will not be built up in a faith that is deeply rooted in the Scriptures. The result is that not a few of our people fall easy victims to all sorts of modern heresies, while many others are utterly helpless in the face of modern false prophets with their claims to Scriptural teachings. It is well and good to point out in books and pamphlets the errors of modern religious movements. But something more is needed: our entire preaching must be more Biblical, more evangelical. In other words, what we would advocate is more expository preaching. The writer's own experience has taught him that a congregation is always attentive and appreciative if the sermon endeavors to bring out the pure gold of the text.

In conclusion the writer wishes to express the hope that this little book may not only be helpful to others, but may also contribute something to the glory of Him Whose name is above every name.

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INTRODUCTION
TO THE
EPISTLES AND GOSPELS
OF THE
CHURCH YEAR

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Epistle. Romans 13: 11-14

The twelfth and thirteenth chapters in Romans contain practical exhortations setting forth, on the basis of God's mercy in Christ, the believer's obligations to his God, his Church, his fellow-Christians and his fellowmen. All these obligations are summed up in the great commandment of love (13:8-10). The first words of our lesson: "And that" (or better: "And this"), have reference to that commandment. The lesson itself is an urgent appeal to the readers, to lead a consecrated life in view of the second coming of the Lord: the night is already far spent; the day of final salvation is nearer now than it was at the time when they first believed.

The lesson is perhaps more appropriate for the second Sunday in Advent than for the first Sunday. Its main thoughts may be expressed as follows: The day is at hand; therefore: (a) let us rise and cast off the works of darkness; (b) let us walk honestly as in the day; (c) let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel. Matthew 21: 1-9

The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is of momentous significance for His ministry: it brings matters to a crisis, and that is what the Lord Himself had intended. He had been in Jerusalem many times before this: with His parents, His disciples, and also alone. But this time, the manner of His coming differs from His previous visits: it is a public declaration of His Messiahship. Jerusalem is to know: "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee." He is hailed as "the Son of David," and He accepts that title; He is pleased with His reception.

Yet, His real majesty consists in His humility: it points to the cross: the way of the cross is His way to the throne. This gives us the answer to the question: How shall we receive our King? The answer is threefold: (a) We recognize His majesty; (b) we accept Him as the King of our hearts; (c) we serve Him with gladness. A close study of the text will show the manner in which this threefold answer can be developed.

At the threshold of a new Church Year, it behooves us to lift up our eyes unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). He is the center of all our preaching and teaching, and this lesson is, therefore, a fitting prelude to the message of the Church.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Epistle. Romans 15: 4-13

The lesson has only a remote bearing on the Advent message. It is from beginning to end hortatory, and it is addressed to the Roman Christians in the interest of peace and harmony in their church. If we study the text from this point of view, we shall find the center of it in the seventh verse: "Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

However, as it may be desirable to emphasize the Advent message, the Old Testament promises, to which reference is made in this passage, may receive a fuller treatment in the light of the Apostle's statement in Second Corinthians 1:20: "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen." Compare also the Lord's sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth, especially His words: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4:21.)

Gospel. Luke 21: 25-36

The second Sunday in Advent calls our attention to the second coming of the Lord. But the *second* coming of the Lord is only the consummation of His *first* coming. Our Christian life is, therefore, a life between the two Advents. It is important to bear this in mind, if the lesson is to be used for an Advent sermon, and not for a sermon on the Last Things.

The lesson is unusually rich so that it is impossible to exhaust it in a single sermon. Moreover, the exegetical study of the text will bring to light certain difficulties, the most important of which revolves around the question whether this discourse of the Lord refers to His second coming or to the destruction of Jerusalem. Our answer to that question is that the words of the Lord have reference to both events; for the destruction of Jerusalem is

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one of the signs of the end; it foreshadows the Lord's second coming.

The close connection between the first and the second coming of the Lord will justify the theme: Our life in the light of the Second Advent; it is to be: (a) a life of joyful expectation; (b) a life of careful preparation.—Another division, more general in nature, would be: The Christian's attitude to the future; it shall be one of hopefulness (v. 28), of patience (v. 32), of watchfulness (v. 36).

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Epistle. 1 Cor. 4: 1-5

The Gospel lesson pictures to us a faithful servant of his Lord. In the Epistle lesson, Paul speaks of faithful ministers of the Gospel. *What is their work?* The answer is given in the first verse: They are Christ's attendants and stewards of God's revealed mysteries. In both expressions individual gifts and qualifications are subordinated to the work that has been entrusted to them. The mysteries of God are identical with the truth revealed in the Gospel. Ministers (attendants) and stewards are persons to whom has been committed an important trust.

How are ministers and stewards to be judged? Not according to their gifts, talents or achievements, but according to the measure of faithfulness with which they have attended to their work (v. 2).

Who is to judge them? According to the Apostle, there are three courts of judgment before which men must appear: the court of public opinion, our own conscience, the judgment of the Lord. (a) Public opinion, the judgment of men, counts for something, but it counts least of all, and it may be altogether false (v. 3). (b) The judgment of our conscience is important, but it is not final (v. 4). (c) The final judgment will be passed upon us on the day of the Lord (v. 5). Let us do our work, conscious of His presence, and certain of His coming.

Gospel. Matthew 11: 2-10

John the Baptist is the great Advent preacher of all times. He was the Lord's forerunner who had been called to prepare His way. But is this particular incident of His life, which occurred after the close of his ministry, the best way to lead us to Christ? Here we see John in his human weakness. The question arises: Can such a man prepare for us

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the way that leads us to Christ? We find the answer in our text.

In the first place, John is in affliction. But in his great distress he turns to the Lord for help. In the second place, John may be a broken reed, but he is not a reed shaken by the wind; he has been true to his convictions. In the third place, Jesus does not excuse John; on the contrary, He warns him. But He does not tolerate a wrong impression of this truly great man.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Epistle. *Philippians 4: 4-7*

The keynote of the letter to the Philippians is joy (Bengel: *Gaudeo; gaudete*). It is also the keynote of this particular passage which describes the source, the nature and the fruits of that joy.

1. The source of all Christian joy is referred to in the words: "The Lord is at hand" (v. 5). The nearness, or presence, of the Lord fills the believer's heart with genuine joy.

2. This joy is different from all other joy. It is not the joy of the world, but the joy of God's children who are assured of their Father's love. It is Advent joy; it is Christmas joy; it is joy "in the Lord" (v. 4).

3. The fruits of this joy are: (a) a spirit of moderation (gentleness or forbearance) manifested towards all men; (b) absence of all anxieties (v. 6a); (c) a life in gratitude and prayer (v. 6b); (d) a heart filled with the peace of God (v. 7).

Gospel. *John 1: 19-28*

This Gospel is intimately connected with that for the third Sunday in Advent. But what a contrast between these two Gospels: there John in his affliction, here John in his glory; there John the forerunner, here John the witness-bearer.

The testimony of John is twofold: it is a testimony concerning himself, and it is a testimony concerning Christ.

1. *The testimony concerning himself.* Many thought and believed John to be the Christ. Why? John was not only a mighty preacher, but also a true prophet in the power and spirit of Elijah. But he solemnly declared and "confessed": "I am not the Christ." Christ is more than a prophet. Yet, although John is not the Christ, he is sent to prepare His way, and therefore his testimony concerning himself leads

to the testimony concerning Christ: "There standeth one among you." v. 26.

2. *The testimony concerning Christ.* Who is Christ, the Christ whom John proclaims? He is the "coming" man, the promised Saviour and Redeemer. John baptizes with water; but Christ is the One who baptizes with the Spirit. John preaches "a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). In Christ there is forgiveness, life and salvation for all who believe.

CHRISTMAS DAY. EARLY SERVICE

Epistle. Titus 2: 11-14

The lesson has no direct reference to the Christmas message. It is rather ethical, and urges us to lead a peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. But the Christmas note may be found expressed in the words of the eleventh verse, that God's saving grace has appeared to all men. The Greek text brings out three points which are important, and may be emphasized in a Christmas sermon: (a) the grace of God is a saving grace (*σωτήριος*: something that brings or produces salvation); (b) this saving grace has made its appearance (*ἐπεφάνη*: the term has reference to a bright light that appears in the heavens and illuminates the darkness; cf. also John 1:5); (c) this saving grace is intended for all men. It is not difficult to connect these three points with the birth of the Saviour. If the entire lesson is to be included in the text, it may then be shown that the appearance of God's saving grace in the person of Jesus Christ constitutes the strongest motive for a godly life.

Second Epistle. Isaiah 9: 2-7

This lesson is the second Epistle for Christmas Day in the *Common Service Book*. It contains one of the most beautiful and best known Messianic prophecies in the Book of Isaiah. It is an appropriate text for a Christmas sermon, particularly when more than one service is held. But the text must be treated in accordance with the day: that is, from the standpoint of fulfillment, not of prophecy; otherwise the sermon will be an Advent sermon, not a Christmas sermon. For this reason the historical circumstances of the text should be referred to only in so far as is necessary to bring out the fact that in the birth of the Christ-child, God's promise of a Redeemer and Saviour has been fulfilled.

Gospel. Luke 2: 1-14

Chronological, historical and critical questions, which may properly be discussed in connection with the exegetical study of this passage, have no place in a Christmas sermon. If mentioned at all, they must be treated only incidentally, and in such a way that the real Christmas message will not be obscured.

The Gospel divides itself into two sections. Verses 1-7 tell the story and circumstances of the Saviour's birth. Verses 8-14 bring out the significance of His birth.

1. God's providence is seen in the events that lead up to the journey of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David. Of still greater significance are the inn and the manger, since they depict extreme want and poverty, and thus illustrate the words of the Apostle in Second Corinthians 8:9: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."

2. The real Christmas message is contained in verses 8-14. An angel is God's messenger. The message itself is one of joy: (a) real joy (good tidings, gospel); (b) great joy (*χαρὰν μεγάλην*); (c) universal joy (to all people). The ground of this joy is expressed in the words, that a Saviour is born (*σωτήρ*; preserver, rescuer from sin and its consequences). The result is that heaven and earth are again united and praise God who has done such wonderful things.

CHRISTMAS DAY. LATER SERVICE

Epistle. Hebrews 1: 1-12

The Epistle for the later service on Christmas Day is an appropriate text for either Advent or Christmas. No translation can give an adequate conception of the literary beauty of this passage, which is the fitting prelude to the entire Epistle to the Hebrews. The principal thought of the text is contained in the first two verses in which God's revelation in the Old Testament is contrasted with His revelation in Christ. The main purpose of the text is to set forth the uniqueness and finality of God's revelation in Christ.

God has revealed Himself before Christ: He has spoken at sundry times and in divers manners to the fathers in the prophets and through the prophets. There is a divine revelation, beginning with the creation of the world and progressing through the history of God's chosen people. But that revelation is not complete and final; it is a revelation *in partibus*, not *in toto*, while the revelation in Christ is perfect and final in every respect.

If the text embraces the entire lesson, the main thought may be expressed in the theme: The superiority of God's revelation in Christ: (a) He is superior to the prophets; (b) He is superior to the angels.

Gospel. John 1: 1-14

The Gospel for the later service on Christmas Day contains the greater part of the prologue to the Gospel of John. Therefore, it may be desirable to include also the last four verses of the prologue. But since it is impossible to treat the text exhaustively, it seems to be the better way to divide the lesson into sections. Verses 1-5 are a suitable text for Advent or Christmas. But it is not an easy text. Verses 6-9 have reference to John the Baptist, and, therefore, belong

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to the Advent season. Verses 10-18 may be treated as a whole, with the fourteenth verse as their center. But the fourteenth verse alone is also an excellent text for Christmas Day.

THE SECOND CHRISTMAS DAY

Epistle. Titus 3: 4-7

The lesson emphasizes three things: (a) God's kindness (*χρηστότης*) and love toward man (*φιλανθρωπία*); (b) the saving grace of baptism as a means of our regeneration (*παλιγγενεσία*); (c) the Christian hope of eternal life. The Christmas note is sounded in the third verse, particularly in the verb "appeared" (*ἐπεφάνη*; cf. Titus 2: 11 in the Epistle for Christmas Day). It reminds us of the words in the Christmas Gospel: "The glory of the Lord shone round about them," and also of the words in John 1: 4f: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shineth in the darkness." God's kindness and love for mankind, as manifested in the birth of the Saviour, may be made the central thought of the sermon.

If the entire lesson is made the basis of the sermon, the Christmas note can be brought out in the theme: Christ's birth and our re-birth, and this theme may be developed as follows: 1. Christ's birth is meant for our re-birth (*Christus natus pro nobis* must become *Christus natus in nobis*); 2. Our re-birth is effected in Holy Baptism, "the washing of regeneration"; 3. The saving power of Baptism must result in a new life of faith, love and hope.

Gospel. Luke 2: 15-20

The Gospel for the second Christmas Day is the continuation of the Christmas Gospel. It is a most appropriate text to be used at any Christmas service. The journey of the shepherds to Bethlehem can teach us how the Christmas message shall be received by us. We call attention to a few points which may be noted in the simple and beautiful language of Luke's narrative: (a) The shepherds consulted together, and encouraged each other to go: some may have

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been more eager than others; (b) when they had decided to go, "they came with haste" (because there was no time to lose), and they found ("seek, and ye shall find"); (c) when they had seen the child, "they made known abroad the saying"; (d) Mary kept all these things, the others merely wondered.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Epistle. Galatians 4: 1-7

The entire lesson is important from the doctrinal point of view. Its selection for the first Sunday after Christmas was probably suggested by the Apostle's statement in the fourth verse, that "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son." The general thought of the lesson pertains to the relation between Christ and the Law. The Law had its place in God's plan of salvation until the coming of Christ. But its place was only temporary and preparatory. When Christ came, the reign of the Law came to an end: it had fulfilled its mission. The coming of Christ signifies the fulness of the time—the final revelation of God in the Son of God. The Son of God became man, He took upon Himself our human nature and fulfilled for us the whole will and law of God, that we might become the children of God. As God's children by adoption, we have the spirit of His Son in our hearts, and this spirit teaches us how to pray and assures us of our inheritance in heaven.

In view of the Christmas season, the main thoughts of the text may be grouped under the theme: What God gave us in Christ: (a) He redeemed us from the Law; (b) He adopted us as His own children; (c) He sent the spirit of His Son into our hearts.

Gospel. Luke 2: 33-40

A study of this Gospel must also include the preceding passage (Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*), which leads up to it and is bound up with it. Even then it is not an easy task to preach on this text and do justice to its contents. A very simple treatment, which may commend itself, but does not pretend to clear up all the difficulties, is suggested by the thought that here we see the Christ-child in the arms of His mother, and face to face with the child, Simeon and Anna,

the representatives of old age. As the Sunday after Christmas is also the last Sunday of the year, the relation of the Christ-child to those who are no longer children, but are advanced in years, would be a proper theme: He is their salvation, their strength, their hope.

THE CIRCUMCISION AND THE NAME OF JESUS (NEW YEAR'S DAY)

Epistle. Galatians 3: 23-29

The ecclesiastical significance of this day lies in "the Circumcision and the Name of Jesus." Both Epistle and Gospel refer to these facts, but have no relation to the beginning of the New Year. The Epistle for this day was chosen because circumcision was the initiation rite by which the male child in Israel was put under the law of Moses. But the law of Moses has been abrogated: it was "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." Christians are no longer under the tutorship of the law. They are God's free children by faith in Christ. In Christ all divisions and parting walls between men are abolished.

The closing verses are the great climax of our Epistle, and inasmuch as the beginning of a new year has its own significance also for Christians, these verses (26-29) may be made the basis of a New Year's sermon.

The beginning of a new year shall remind us of our spiritual possessions: In Christ we are all one; in Christ we are all free; in Christ we are all equal. The same division may be used for a Reformation sermon.

Gospel. Luke 2: 21

The Church as such does not recognize the calendar year in the order of her festival days. She numbers her days not by the sun and moon, but is guided in her course by the Sun of Righteousness. Yet it so happens that "the eighth day" after Christmas is also the first day of the year. The name *Jesus* is inscribed in golden letters over the portal of a new year. The significance of this name should be set forth in a sermon on the Gospel for the day. Three points may be emphasized: (a) His name is "a name which is

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above every name" (Phil. 2:9f); (b) His name gives us the assurance that the New Year will be an "acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:19; Isa. 61:2); (c) therefore, "whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (Col. 3:17).

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Epistle. 1 Peter 4: 12-19

First Peter is a letter of "encouragement" (cf. 5: 12, and also Hebr. 13: 22). The Christians, to whom the letter is addressed, thought it strange that they should be persecuted for their faith. The greater part of the letter has reference to their condition, and, therefore, deals with the problem of Christian suffering—not suffering in general, but suffering for Christ's sake, referred to in our text as "the fiery trial." Suffering of this kind is, after all, nothing strange. It is a sure sign that we are "partakers of Christ's sufferings" and shall therefore share also in His glory. Instead of being ashamed of our sufferings, or distressed in our minds, it is the proper attitude for us to commit our souls to the Lord who is faithful in all His doings and will keep us in His grace.

In the *General Prayer* we pray for "those who are in suffering for Thy name and for Thy truth's sake." That is the "fiery trial" to which Peter refers in our Epistle. The problem of suffering is as old as mankind; compare the Book of Job. There may be no theoretical solution of the problem. But for the Christian the problem is solved in the Cross of the Saviour. Theme: The fiery trial; (a) its nature (fellowship with the sufferings of Christ); (b) its purpose (to test our faith; to bring out the pure gold of our faith); (c) its fruits (joy and peace, endurance and hope).

Gospel. Matthew 2: 15-23

The Gospel falls into three parts: the flight into Egypt; the slaughter of the innocents; the return to Nazareth. Each part is connected with a prophecy: the flight into Egypt, with Hosea 11: 1; the slaughter of the innocents, with Jeremiah 31: 15; the return to Nazareth, with prophecies culminating

in Isaiah 53. The dominant note in the Gospel is the thought that while the world persecutes the Saviour, God is with Him and protects Him until He has accomplished His work. The little children of Bethlehem, whose fate is bound up with the Christ-child, may be regarded as the first martyrs who have not died in vain and have not lived in vain.

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

Epistle. Isaiah 60: 1-6

The Epistle is one of the few lessons taken from the Old Testament. It is a very excellent text for Epiphany Day. But it should be treated in the light of the New Testament. Epiphany is the manifestation of the Lord's divine glory. The manifestation of the Lord's glory, as revealed in our text, brings to us a threefold message: (1) "Thy light is come": Christ is here; the gross darkness that covered the earth has vanished; (2) Therefore, "arise, shine": let the light in; let Christ become the light of your soul; (3) "The Gentiles shall come to thy light": they will come if we bring the light of the Gospel to them.

Gospel. Matthew 2: 1-12

The meaning of Epiphany is the manifestation of the Lord's divine glory before the world. His *epiphany* is in reality a *theophany* (Augustine: *Manifestatus est redemptor omnium gentium et solemnitatem fecit omnibus gentibus*). In accordance with this view, the central thought of the Gospel may be found expressed in the words: "We are come to worship Him" (v. 2), and also in verse 11: "They fell down and worshipped Him." In developing this thought, three things may be noted: (a) the inner desire of the wise men, which starts them on their journey to Jerusalem; (b) the star that guides them until they find the child; (c) the realization of their hopes, expressed in the gifts of their grateful hearts.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Epistle. Romans 12: 1-5

The Epistle lessons for the first four Sundays in the Epiphany season are taken from Romans 12 and 13. The general character of these chapters is well known. They contain a summary of Paul's Ethics. Nowhere else has the Apostle given such a full and complete description of the Christian life in all its directions, and there is hardly a single verse in these chapters that may not be used as a fruitful text for a sermon. The exegetical study of the text is important and will result for the student in an abundance of sermonic material. We confine ourselves to a brief analysis of the text.

The first two verses of chapter 12 are fundamental, and at the same time form the connecting link between the doctrinal and the practical part of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Here the Apostle sets forth, on the basis of God's mercies in Christ, the obligations of the believer to his God. These two verses may, therefore, be taken as a separate text. The next three verses (3-5) belong already to the second set of exhortations which deals with the believer's obligations to his fellow-Christians. But, as the lesson includes these verses, the entire contents of our Epistle may be summed up as follows: The consecrated life; it is a life (a) dedicated to God; (b) separated from the world; (c) devoted to the service of our brethren.

Gospel. Luke 2: 41-52

The first two chapters of Luke contain Nativity stories which have no parallel in the other Gospels. They point to Mary as the source from which Luke received them. The last of these nativity stories pertains to the boyhood of Jesus. As a single episode it stands by itself, but is connected with

the preceding by verse 40 and with the following by verse 52. Verse 40 has reference to the first twelve years of the Lord's life. Verse 52 covers the period from His twelfth to His thirtieth year. If both verses are included in the text, the meditation may lead to the theme: The ideal life of Jesus, and this theme may result in the following division: (a) A life of normal, natural growth; (b) a life of perfect inner harmony; (c) a life with God in the service of men.

If the Gospel is treated in the light of Epiphany, it will reveal the glory of the only begotten Son of God in the child Jesus. His glory may be seen in three statements of the Gospel: (a) "The child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem": what kept Him there was His love for the house and the Word of God; (b) His own words: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business" (or "in my Father's house"): a revelation of His higher self-consciousness; (c) "He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject unto them."

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Epistle. Romans 12: 6-16

It is impossible to treat this wonderfully rich and suggestive lesson exhaustively in a single sermon. It may, therefore, be preferable to select only a few verses, or even a single verse, from the lesson. This can be done without violating sound exegetical or homiletic principles, since the exhortations are only loosely connected with each other. But the easier way is not always the more excellent way, and the present prevailing tendency, to select short texts and treat them without paying attention to the context, is not to be commended. Even with respect to this Epistle, it is possible, though it may seem difficult, to bring the various exhortations under one heading. The following meditation may be helpful to others.

Paul describes the Christian life, and we all agree that it is a wonderful description. Let us suppose that a non-Christian would, for the first time, listen to such a description. What would be his impression? Would he not be attracted by it? Would he not say: If that is the genuine Christian life, then it must be something great, something wonderful and beautiful. And let us further suppose that all Christians would actually live such a life, would that not be the greatest boon to Christianity? Thoughts of this kind may lead us to the theme: The beauty of a Christian life. Our text reveals this beauty in three ways: It is first the beauty of *simplicity*; it is then the beauty of *richness*; it is finally the beauty of *unselfishness*.

1. Paul's description of a Christian life must appeal to all true Christians; for what he says is so natural and simple that they will at once understand him: it is the life of all the children of God; it is the life that has its roots in the inner life of the soul.

2. But with the beauty of simplicity is also connected a beauty of richness. The inner life of the soul expresses itself in all directions. We may think of a tree with its rich foliage and its bountiful fruits (cf. Ps. 1:5; Ps. 92:12-14). In whatever station or condition of life the Christian may be—in joy or in tears, doing his own work or the work of the Lord, battling with the problems of life or engaged in the service of love—his life is always beautiful and attractive.

3. But the Christian life has a beauty that is altogether its own: it is the beauty of unselfishness, the beauty of a love that has been kindled by the love of Christ.

Gospel. John 2:1-11

It is advisable to begin the study of this Gospel with verse 11, which contains the key to the entire Gospel: 1. Jesus manifested His glory; 2. His disciples believed on Him. The first statement explains the purpose of the miracle (or "sign"); the second tells of its intended effect.

1. How did the Lord manifest His glory? Three points may be noted: (a) He performed a miracle, a "sign" as John calls it; (b) He said to His mother: "My hour is not yet come"; (c) He was the bringer of joy, the giver of gifts that gladden the heart.

2. Why did His disciples believe on Him? (a) It was the first of His signs which they witnessed; (b) His sign was to them not only a proof of His divine power, but also an outward indication of His divine mission; (c) as this sign was only the beginning of His signs, so their faith in Him was only the beginning of a faith that gradually increased (*ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*).

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Epistle. Romans 12: 16-21

The Apostle's exhortations with regard to the believer's life and conduct reach their climax in this passage. The key-thought of the text is in harmony with the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: Love your enemies. It is the royal way of Jesus and of all that are His true disciples. Yet, the Apostle seems to go a step farther: he teaches that it is the only way in which evil can be overcome (vs. 20b and 21). Is he not too optimistic about it? Is his belief in the ultimate victory of the good justified? Paul's optimism is based upon his interpretation of the Lord's death. The Cross of Christ is the means by which the greatest evil, sin with all its dire consequences, was overpowered. This thought, although it is not expressed here in words, is the key to the heart of our text. With this thought in our mind, we may formulate the theme: The battle with evil; (a) the way of the world: to avenge, to pay back; (b) the royal way of Jesus: to heap coals of fire on the head of the enemy, and thus overcome evil with good.

Gospel. Matthew 8: 1-13

The two stories, which are combined in our Gospel, are typical examples of the Lord's healing ministry (cf. Matt. 4: 23ff). Both emphasize (a) the Lord's willingness to help, and (b) His supernatural power over the forces that destroy life. If the text takes in the entire Gospel, it may be shown how the Lord in these two typical examples of His healing ministry manifests His divine glory. But it is perfectly proper to divide the Gospel and make either the first or the second story the basis of the sermon.

The story of the centurion is especially rich, and may

commend itself because it brings out the nature and significance of true faith. Three points may be noted in connection with the centurion's faith: (a) it is the faith of a man who is outside of the covenant of Israel; (b) his faith is implicit trust and confidence in the word of the Lord (*fiducia*) ; (c) his faith is saving faith (*fides salvifica* : v. 13).

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Epistle. Romans 13: 8-10

There are no exegetical difficulties connected with this text. Nor can there be any doubt about its central thought, which is expressed in verse 8: "He that loveth another (not himself, but τὸν ἕτερον: the other man, his neighbor) hath fulfilled the law," and also in verse 10: "Love is the fulfilling (or fulfillment) of the law." The real difficulties lie in the question: *Why* is love the fulfillment of the law? We cannot answer that question unless we understand the nature of the law as well as the nature of love. The law demands; it threatens; it warns; it condemns; it is essentially without love. Love, on the other hand, is free; it knows in itself of no law, except the law of love, which is no external law, but an inner force. Yet, there is a higher unity in which love and law may become one. We see this oneness of love and law fully realized in the person of Christ. And they may become one in our lives if we put the love of Christ into the law. Then love will be the fulfillment of the law. Theme: Law and love: (a) law without love; (b) love without law; (c) law and love united.

Gospel. Matthew 8: 23-27

The stilling of the tempest in the sea (σεισμός perhaps suggests a tidal wave due to an earthquake and accompanied by a heavy wind) may be regarded as a manifestation of the Lord's glory in three directions: (a) His words: "O ye of little faith" (ὀλιγόπιστοι), put courage into the hearts of His disciples; (b) by rebuking the winds and the sea He demonstrated His power over the elements of nature; (c) "men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this?"

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Epistle. Colossians 3: 12-17

The Epistle to the Colossians was written by the Apostle while he was a prisoner (1:24; 4:3; 4:18). But its two outstanding features are its christological statements and its emphasis on the inner life. Both of these characteristics are evident in this beautiful set of exhortations, which have their center in verse 16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you." Verses 12-15 may teach us what "the word of Christ" means. Verses 16-17 tell us how that word shall dwell in us.

1. Paul's exhortations in verses 12-15 are based upon the teachings of Jesus. We may, therefore, say that the word of Christ has reference (a) to the words spoken by the Master Himself. But we cannot separate the words of the Master from the example of the Master (b); notice especially verse 13. Finally, the word of Christ has also, and primarily, reference (c) to the Gospel itself: it is the word about Christ or "the word of the cross."

2. What shall we do with the word of Christ? The Apostle tells us: "Let the word of Christ *dwell* in you" (*ἐνοικεῖτω* refers to an intimate relationship); let it dwell first in your *hearts* (*ἐν ὑμῖν*), then in your *homes* ("in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another"), then in your *worship* ("in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing gracefully and whole-heartedly to the Lord"), finally in your *daily life* ("do all in the name of the Lord Jesus").

Gospel. Matthew 13: 24-30

The manifestation of the Lord's glory, which is the dominant note in the lessons for the Epiphany season, seems to have no place in this particular Gospel. It may perhaps be found in the general truth, which is taught here, that

the kingdom of heaven will grow in spite of the tares which the enemy has sown among the wheat. As long as the kingdom is still in the growing stage, it is not yet perfect. This the disciples must realize in their future work of planting the kingdom (cf. the parable of the Sower). There will always be tares among the wheat. The question may be asked: How did the tares get there? The servants are told: "An enemy hath done this." But it is more important to ask: What shall be done with the tares? The servants are inclined to root them up. But they are told: "Let both grow together until the harvest." A separation will surely take place; but it will not take place until the harvest comes. Until that day arrives (the day of the Lord's *παρουσία*), the disciples must learn to do their work (a) in faith, (b) in patience, (c) in hope.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Epistle. 2 Peter 1:16-21

Critics have questioned the genuineness of Second Peter. But the internal evidence is excellent. The writer refers in several places to his intimate personal relations with Jesus. One of the most important references is found in this passage. In making known the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (*δύναμις* refers to the Lord's resurrection, *παρουσία* to His second coming), the writer did not follow "cunningly devised fables" (fictitious myths), but he spoke as an eye-witness of His divine majesty (*μεγαλείότης*). He was present with Him on the mount of Transfiguration, and he heard the Father's voice from heaven, saying: "Thou art my beloved Son." That voice confirms the Messianic prophecies (Isa. 42:1; Ps. 2:7), and it makes the prophetic word so much surer. It is true that we are still waiting for the final manifestation of the Lord's glory. But, in the meantime, we have the prophetic word as a "light that shineth in a dark place until the day shall break forth and the morning star shall arise." We can trust in the prophetic word, for true prophecy is always the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The reference to the Lord's transfiguration is very definite. But the central thought of the text has a wider scope. That thought may be expressed in the theme: The divine majesty of Jesus: (a) witnessed by His disciples; (b) confirmed by God the Father; (c) attested by the prophets. Incidentally it may be noted that verse 21 refers to the inspirational character of the Old Testament prophecies.

Gospel. Matthew 17:1-9

The story of the Lord's transfiguration has its proper place on the last Sunday in the Epiphany season. The glory of the only begotten Son of the Father is manifested here as nowhere else in the Lord's life. But it is a peculiar glory:

it arises on the dark background of His Passion, and it anticipates His glorified state after the Resurrection. Both, His Passion and Resurrection, were still in the future. The intimate connection of this incident with the Lord's Passion is brought out in the statement that it occurred six days after the memorable confession of Peter. The significance of the Transfiguration for the disciples is expressed (a) in the voice from heaven (especially in the words: "Hear ye Him"), and (b) in the vision of Moses and Elias, who disappear, while Jesus remains. As the King of Glory He will always abide with us.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

Epistle. 1 Corinthians 9: 24—10: 5

The lesson divides itself into two parts, which are more or less independent of each other. The first part (9: 24-27) is the concluding section of the ninth chapter in which the Apostle sets forth his own conduct as an example of self-denying and self-sacrificing love. The second part (10: 1-5) is the introductory section of the next chapter in which he refers to Israel's experience in the wilderness as a warning example for the Christians.

The first part of the lesson will commend itself to most preachers. Here we have the Apostle's own ideal of life under the figure of an athletic contest. His life has a definite goal: he is striving for an incorruptible crown (cf. Phil. 3: 14f). The goal is within his reach. But in order to reach the goal and win the prize, he must forget all other things and devote himself to a life of self-sacrifice and service. Is Paul's ideal of life *our* ideal? And are we willing to pay the price that he was willing to pay?

Gospel. Matthew 20: 1-16

The parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard is a masterpiece of narrative. It divides itself into three sections (1-7; 8-10; 11-15), of which the third brings the climax and contains the lesson of the parable. The last verse (16) belongs properly not to the parable itself, but to its framework (cf. 19: 30).

The first section of the parable tells of a householder who hires laborers at different hours of the day to work in his vineyard. With the first group he enters into an agreement; the second group receives the promise of fair treatment; no agreement or promise is mentioned when the other groups are engaged, but they doubtless understood that they would be treated fairly.

The next section of the parable brings two surprises: (a) in the payment of the wages, the usual order is reversed; (b) all laborers receive the same wages. The first surprise simply leads up to the second; but the second surprise requires an explanation.

The explanation is given in the form of a dialogue between the householder and one of the dissatisfied laborers. Two points are emphasized by the householder: (a) no principle of justice has been violated by him in the treatment of all his laborers; (b) his treatment of the last laborers is an act of purest kindness and generosity on his part, and as such it ought not to be begrudged by any one.

The lesson of the parable is clear: it teaches the fundamental truth, that the kingdom of heaven is essentially a kingdom of grace. God's free grace is the only principle according to which he will deal with us. The lesson of the parable is, therefore, identical with Paul's doctrine of free grace (*sola gratia*). At the same time, the parable makes it clear that in dealing with us according to His grace, God does not violate any principle of justice.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

Epistle. 2 Corinthians 11: 19—12: 9

Second Corinthians is the most personal of all the letters that Paul has written. He wrote this letter not with pen and ink only, but with the blood of his heart (cf. 3: 1ff). Our lesson is one of the high spots in his letter: from the literary point of view, it belongs to the *genus majesticum*.

The lesson is much too long to be treated exhaustively in a single sermon. However, if such an attempt is made, verses 16-18 of the eleventh chapter and verse 10 of the twelfth chapter should also be included. In that case, the introduction would have to deal with the historic conditions by which this outpouring of Paul's heart was occasioned, and it would lead to the theme: A survey of the Apostle's life: (a) his Apostolic career (11: 16-33); (b) his inner life (12: 1-6); (c) the source and secret of his strength (12: 7-10). In his Apostolic career we note his travels with their hardships, privations and perils. In connection with the second point (b), the "visions and revelations" should be interpreted as the climax of his inner life or his communion with God in Christ. The last verses emphasize the grace of God as the source and secret of the Apostle's strength, in spite of "the thorn in the flesh."

If only a part of this Epistle is chosen, we would suggest the last few verses (7-10), with the emphasis placed upon the all-sufficiency of God's grace in Christ. What does God's grace in Christ mean? It means, first of all, the assurance of God's forgiveness, and this assurance is coupled with joy and peace in the heart of the believer. But God's grace means more: it means also power and strength in the midst of weakness.

Gospel. Luke 8: 4-15

The parable of the Sower is of fundamental significance. It is recorded in the three Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 13: 1-23;

Mark 4: 1-20; Luke 8: 4-15), and it marks the beginning of the Lord's parabolic teaching. It deals with the Word of God in its relation to the human heart. But it must not be overlooked that it stands also in close relation to the Kingdom of God. According to the Lord's own interpretation, the parable was intended to teach the disciples "the mysteries of the kingdom of God" (cf. Matt. 13: 10-17; Mark 4: 10-14; Luke 8: 9-10). Leaving aside all critical questions, we may say that there is a twofold mystery connected with the kingdom of God: (a) the Kingdom of God is planted by the Word of God; (b) the Word of God has not always the same effect. With respect to these two points we must take to heart the Lord's words: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

The Kingdom of God is planted by the Word of God. There is no other way to establish it, to prepare for it: "A sower went out to sow his seed." But the seed is sown for the purpose of bearing fruit. When will it bear fruit? Experience teaches us that it cannot bear fruit in a heart that is either indifferent, or without depth, or divided in its interests. If the word is to bear fruit in our hearts, we must (a) receive and keep it, and (b) nourish and cultivate it.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

Epistle. 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

Paul's great chapter on love—the New Testament song of songs—is a fitting introduction to the season of Lent. Although no reference is made in the lesson to Christ and His redemption, nevertheless, there is an inner connection between Paul's description of love in this chapter and the word of the Cross. What love is and means, and what it can do, Paul has learned from no one but Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20: "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"). There is no doubt that Paul wrote this chapter with his eyes fixed upon the Cross. And if we substitute for the abstract "love" (*ἀγάπη*) the concrete and personal "Christ crucified" (*Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον*), we shall have before us a picture of love personified.

The chapter falls into three parts, which are designed to show that the way of love is the royal way (cf. 12:31): (a) Love is indispensable; for without it all other gifts (*χαρίσματα*) become worthless (verses 1-3); (b) love is incomparable; it surpasses all other Christian virtues; it has a sustaining power that will never wear out (verses 4-7); (c) love is imperishable; all other things pass away, but faith, love and hope, these three (they are also mentioned together in I Thess. 1:3 and Col. 1:4f), will abide.

If a single verse is chosen, we would call attention to the seventh verse, where the omnipotence of love is described: Love *beareth, believeth, hopeth, endureth—all things*. We shall fully realize the truth of this statement if we look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross (Hebr. 12:2).

Gospel. Luke 18: 31-43

There can be no question why this Gospel was chosen for this particular Sunday: it prepares us for the Lenten

message. The Lord's announcement of His Passion (His *passio magna*) is introduced by the significant words: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem," and the same words may be taken as a motto for the season of Lent which is before us. The evangelist tells us that when Jesus spoke to His disciples about His suffering and death, "they understood none of these things." Do we understand the meaning of His Passion? The first part of our Gospel suggests to us two lines of thought that may lead us into a deeper and fuller understanding of the Lord's Passion: (a) The prophecies to which Jesus refers culminate in the idea of a suffering Messiah who takes upon Himself the sins of His people; (b) the Son of Man, after giving His life, shall rise again and lead to perfection those for whom He died.

The second part of our Gospel speaks of the healing of a blind man near Jericho. The Son of Man, on His way to the cross, is not thinking of Himself, but of others. The blind man who implores Him for mercy, receives his sight and follows Him, glorifying God. The story carries its own message with it. But it is not difficult to connect it with the first part of the Gospel.

ASH WEDNESDAY. THE FIRST DAY OF LENT

Epistle. Joel 2: 12-19

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Its observance as a fasting day has been responsible for the choice of both lessons, the Epistle and the Gospel.

Fasting was originally not a part of the normal religious life in Israel. Fasting days were observed only on extraordinary occasions: in times of great calamity and distress. In later times it became customary to fast twice in the week (cf. Luke 18:12). Jesus did not insist that His disciples should fast (cf. Mark 2:18-22, particularly verse 19: "As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.")).

The lesson from Joel has reference to an extraordinary day of fasting. It is *an impressive call to repentance*. What God demands is not an external observance of certain rites and ceremonies, but true repentance: a change of heart and life, a turning away from sin and a sincere approach to God, that he may spare his people and be merciful to them. Joel's message has the true prophetic ring; it is a message for us.

Gospel. Matthew 6: 16-21

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving were the three principal forms in which religion was practiced in the days of our Lord. They are all three referred to in the Sermon on the Mount (almsgiving, 6:2-4; prayer, 6:5-15; fasting, 6:16-18). Jesus observed the insincerity and hypocrisy connected with the practice of religion (cf. 6:1) in these three forms: they were no longer an expression of the inner life, but had become purely external rites (*opera operata*), to which a meritorious value was attributed. He did not reject those forms. But He filled them with a new spirit. True religion is communion with God, and communion with

God as the Father, in the sense in which all the disciples of Jesus possess and enjoy it, is the source of joy and peace. This is the new spirit to which Jesus makes reference in our text, and wherever this spirit prevails, there it will fill the existing forms with a new life and content, or it may even create entirely new forms (cf. Mark 2:18-22).

INVOCAVIT. THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Epistle. 2 Corinthians 6: 1-10

The Epistle for the first Sunday in Lent is wonderfully rich. The greater part of it (3-10) refers to Paul's own ministry, and has that intimate personal touch which is characteristic of the entire Second Epistle to the Corinthians (cf. also verse 11). It is an excellent text for an ordination sermon, or an occasion similar to it. The first two verses are an appropriate text for Lent. But it must not be overlooked that they are closely connected with the last two verses of the preceding chapter. Taken together, these four verses (5:20—6:2) constitute a most effective appeal, to be reconciled to God: (a) the work of reconciliation; (b) the word of reconciliation; (c) the time of reconciliation. The work of reconciliation is the basis of the appeal: it is not the work of men, but the work of God in Christ (cf. v. 21, but also vv. 18 and 19). The word of reconciliation comes to us in the Gospel, which in itself is an urgent appeal, to be reconciled to God (cf. v. 20). The time of reconciliation is now, as long as we have the opportunity to hear the Gospel (cf. especially v. 2, and note the significance of the Greek phrase *καιρὸς εὐπρόσδεκτος*).

Gospel. Matthew 4: 1-11

The ancient Church has looked upon the Lord's work of redemption as a battle with Satan. This view has been a determining factor in selecting the Gospels for the season of Lent. It explains why the story of the Lord's temptation in the wilderness is placed before us on the first Sunday in Lent. It also suggests to us from what angle this Scripture passage, which presents so many dogmatic difficulties, should be treated.

If the Lord's temptation, which followed so closely upon His baptism, was part of His divine mission, then we must

conclude that it was altogether unique. It is without analogy in our lives, and it is therefore a mistake to compare the three attacks of Satan to the three temptations that are mentioned in 1 John 2:16 (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life). The three temptations of the Lord are essentially one; back of them lies the question, in which the Lord has felt the influence of a Satanic power: In what manner shall the Messiah accomplish His work of redemption? In the struggle that came out of that question, the Lord has not wavered for a moment; He has resisted Satan's attempts to suggest to Him a way that would lead Him to the throne without the cross. It would have been the way of human success, but it would have defeated God's very plan and purpose. This was the real nature of the Lord's temptation in the wilderness. But it was a temptation that came from without, not from within. It was a battle with Satan himself. And His victory over Satan, at the very outset of His ministry, gives us the assurance that we have in Him a merciful and faithful high priest who can help us in our temptations.

REMINISCERE. THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Epistle. 1 Thessalonians 4: 1-7

The practical exhortations in First Thessalonians are based upon the oral instructions which the Thessalonian Christians had received from the Apostle while he was with them. He refers to those instructions in the words: "Ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God." The nature of those instructions may be expressed in one word: *Consecration*. The church at Thessalonica was a Gentile Christian church. Idolatry and immorality were the two vices characteristic of heathenism. The same vices are found today among Christians. The appeal for a consecrated life is, therefore, always appropriate. But, instead of emphasizing the negative side of a consecrated life, it is still more important to show the positive development of such a life in the formation of Christian character. Christian character is formed by habits into which we must grow, not by spasmodic efforts, but by daily repentance and faith. Two thoughts suggest themselves in our Epistle: (a) We know how we ought to walk and to please God; (b) therefore, let us abound more and more.

Gospel. Matthew 15: 21-28

The Church has chosen this lesson as the Gospel for the second Sunday in Lent because it illustrates the truth that the Son of Man came to destroy the works of the devil. But apart from that relation, the story of the Syrophœnician woman is of great significance. It is closely related to the story of the centurion (cf. Matt. 8: 5-13). The Syrophœnician woman and the centurion of Capernaum are both outside of the household of Israel. But, in each case, their faith overcomes all obstacles. And, in each case, the Lord Himself has commended such a faith. Of the faith of the

centurion Jesus said: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." To the woman of Canaan, He said: "O woman, great is thy faith." What is the characteristic of the woman's faith, by which she breaks down all barriers? It is its *perseverance*. By her perseverance the woman of Canaan deserves a place in the hall of the heroes of faith in Hebrews eleven.

Our Gospel would justify a theme like this: the victory of faith: (a) no victory without battle; (b) no battle without victory.

OCULI. THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Epistle. Ephesians 5: 1-9

Sermons on the Epistles must avoid the danger of moralizing. It is easy to avoid that danger in this particular case if the significance of the first verse is fully comprehended: "Be ye therefore followers (*μιμηταί*: imitators) of God, as dear children." The highest ideal of a Christian life is set before us in these words. The key to the verse is contained in the words: "As dear children." If God is our Father, and we are His children, it is our duty and our privilege to imitate and follow him. The meaning is substantially the same as that of the words in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). If we then ask the question how such an ideal can be realized, we shall find the answer in our text. Verse 2 calls our attention to the sacrifice of Christ, and admonishes us to "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." The exhortations in verses 3-9 are summed up in the words: "Walk as children of light" (v. 8). As love and gratitude are closely related, so light and holiness are almost synonymous terms. The life of God's children is a life (a) in gratitude, (b) in love, (c) in holiness.

Gospel. Luke 11: 14-28

A special class of sufferers to whom the Lord devoted Himself in the course of His ministry of mercy is referred to in the Gospels as persons that were possessed of an evil spirit. The healing of such persons attracted wide attention, and brought the Lord into conflict with the religious leaders of His people. Such a scene is before us in our Gospel, which contains one of the most important and impressive discourses of our Lord with regard to this side of His healing ministry. In connection with the exegetical study

of our text, the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark (Matt. 12:22-30; Mark 3:22-27) should be carefully examined.

The homiletic treatment of our Gospel presents certain difficulties. But these are not as great as it may seem to us at the first glance. We remember that Christ came to destroy the kingdom of darkness. His power over Satan and the forces of darkness is demonstrated by the fact that He casts out devils. Those who accuse Him of being in alliance with Beelzebub are the enemies of God in whose power and spirit Jesus is doing His work. The battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness is still going on. Therefore it becomes our duty to place ourselves on the Lord's side. There is no other choice: "He who is not with Me is against Me" (v. 23). These words of the Lord are the center of our Gospel. They sound like a clarion call to all who are indifferent or wavering, faint-hearted or discouraged.

LAETARE. THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Epistle. Galatians 4: 21-31

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is the *Magna Charta* of Christian liberty. Our lesson contains one of the arguments of the Apostle by which he endeavors to bring the Galatian Christians back to the true conception of the Gospel. The argument is based upon the story of Abraham's two children: Ishmael and Isaac (cf. Genesis 16 and 21). Ishmael was the son of the bondwoman Hagar, and was born after the flesh. Isaac, the son of the freewoman, was given to Abraham by promise. The bondwoman and the freewoman prefigure two divine covenants: the covenant of the law and the covenant of grace. The children of the bondwoman represent the Jewish Church ("Jerusalem which now is"). The children of the freewoman are the believers, whose mother is that Jerusalem which is above (cf. also Heb. 12:22 and Rev. 21:2, 9ff). The argument of the Apostle leads to the appeal (5:1) to stand fast in the liberty where-with Christ has made us free.

Gospel. John 6: 1-15

This Gospel is similar to the Gospel for the seventh Sunday after Trinity. Several critics believe that both accounts have reference to the same event. We do not share in that belief, but hold that John's account refers to a different occasion (cf. also Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17). At all events, it is of great importance to note the difference between the Synoptic accounts and John's account. John's account of the feeding of the five thousand is the introduction to the Lord's great discourse on Himself as the bread of life. If our Gospel is treated in the light of that discourse, there is no danger that the same lines of

thought will be followed in treating the Gospel for the seventh Sunday after Trinity. In other words, the emphasis must be laid on the symbolic significance of John's account. The hungry people are a picture of the world, which is in need of the bread of life. Jesus came to satisfy that need: (a) He *is* the bread of life; (b) He *gives* the bread of life; (c) He wants us to distribute the bread of life.

JUDICA. PASSION SUNDAY

Epistle. Hebrews 9: 11-15

The Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the greatest literary documents of the Apostolic Church. Its doctrinal importance ranks next to that of the Epistle to the Romans. But, because of its peculiar theological character, we would suggest that the student first make himself familiar with the general contents of the Epistle before he takes up the study of an individual passage. One of the central ideas in the Epistle is the high priestly office of the Saviour. That idea is underlying the Apostle's line of thought in our text. The functions of the high priest culminated in the bloody sacrifice, which he offered for the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement. Christ obtains eternal redemption for us by offering Himself for our sins. The contrast between the high priest of the Old Testament and the mediator of the New Covenant brings out two essential differences: (a) there the blood of goats and calves—here the precious blood of Christ; (b) there the purifying of the flesh—here the purging of the conscience.

The central thought of the text is Christ's work of redemption: (a) its nature; (b) its means; (c) its fruit. Its nature: His redemption is real, universal, eternal; its means: His own blood; its fruit: a life consecrated to the service of the living God.

Gospel. John 8: 46-59

The presence of Jesus in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, and His testimony concerning Himself, lead to a disputation with the Jews, the latter part of which is recorded in our Gospel. Jesus not only defends Himself against their charges, that He is a Samaritan and has a devil, but also repeats His testimony concerning Himself, and points to another testimony that is greater than His own: the testi-

mony of His Father who honors Him while they dishonor Him. But He is frequently interrupted, and finally they take up stones to cast at Him.

The Gospel, as a whole, is unquestionably a difficult text. But if we take into consideration the name and character of the Sunday, together with the Introit in which the psalmist appeals from the judgment of a misguided people to the higher judgment of the God of light and truth (cf. Ps. 43:1ff), we may see in this disputation of Christ with the Jews (who represent the hostile world) a twofold appeal: (a) Christ's appeal from the judgment of the world to the higher judgment of His Father; (b) God's appeal in Christ to the world and to us.

PALMARUM. THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Epistle. Philippians 2: 5-11

The doctrinal significance of this famous passage must not obscure the fact that it has an altogether practical aim, which is clearly stated in the first verse: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." If we consider our entire Epistle in the light of that introductory statement, we shall find that it is a most appropriate text for the beginning of Holy Week. It calls upon us to concentrate our thoughts on *the mind of Christ*, as His mind is revealed in Paul's wonderful survey of His entire life—from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven. Paul was perhaps less familiar with the details of our Lord's life and ministry than his fellow-Apostles, who had been His companions for three years. But he understood the mind of Christ; he knew His heart, and that is, after all, the most important thing. He saw in the Lord's whole life an example of self-denying, self-sacrificing love and faithful obedience to the will of the Father, an obedience "unto death, even the death of the cross." He saw in it a burning desire to serve and lay down His own life for the redemption and salvation of the world. "Let this mind be in you," Paul says. The question is: How can the mind of Christ become *our* mind? The answer of our text is twofold: (a) Let us accept Him as our Saviour, together with all others who confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord"; (b) let us follow His example.

Gospel. Matthew 21: 1-9

The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem marks the beginning of His way to the cross (His *passio magna*). The significance of *Palmarum* demands that we treat our Gospel from a point of view which is in accordance with the general meaning of Holy Week.

The Lord had been in Jerusalem on many other occasions. His coming at this time signifies His suffering and death on the cross. But, before laying down His life for the sins of the world, He makes a last and final appeal to His people: He proclaims Himself publicly and openly as the Messiah. His appeal is, apparently, not in vain: those who accompany Him, hail Him as the Son of David. But, only a few days later, He is crucified. Yet the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross, makes a stronger appeal to our hearts than the Jesus who came to Jerusalem.

HOLY WEEK

Mark 8: 31-33

Holy Week brings us face to face with the suffering and death of the Lord. As we listen to the reading of the Passion History, we may ask: What is the meaning of it all? When Jesus Himself, after Peter's glorious confession at Cæsarea Philippi, began to teach His disciples, "that the Son of man must suffer many things," Peter rebuked Him: he did not understand the Lord, nor did any of the other disciples understand Him. But Jesus said to Peter: "Thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men."

The Lord's Passion is a mystery. But it is a blessed and adorable mystery. And the New Testament gives us more than one key, so that we may understand that mystery. Such a key is given us in our text. The words of our Lord throw a threefold light upon His *via dolorosa*: (a) The way of the Cross is God's way, and because it is God's way, it cannot end in darkness, but must lead out of darkness into light (*via crucis*—*via lucis*); (b) the way of the Cross is the way of perfect obedience, and, therefore, it is the way to absolute perfection; (c) the way of the Cross is the way of the "Son of man" who came to give His life a ransom for many.

Mark 14: 60-61a

When Jesus stood before the high priest, and was requested by him to give His answer to the charges of the false witnesses against Him, He "held His peace and answered nothing." This silence of Jesus, in the face of His accusers, is significant. It reveals a majesty that is altogether unique. What does the silence of Jesus signify?

In what way does it reveal His majesty? If we concentrate our thoughts on that question, we may find a threefold answer: (a) It is a majesty of perfect holiness: not only

the silence of innocence, but of the holiness of God, personified in Him; (b) it is a majesty of perfect love: not the silence of hatred, but of a love that breaks His heart in order that it may go out and embrace all men; (c) it is a majesty that consists in the perfect union of holiness and love: if we look upon the silent Jesus in His majesty, we realize our sins, but we also say to Him: I will not let Thee except Thou bless me.

2 Corinthians 5: 14-21

The last verses of this text bear close relation to the Epistle for the first Sunday in Lent. But the entire passage is one of the greatest texts for a sermon on Good Friday. In warmth of feeling and depth of thought, it has few equals in Paul's Epistles. The only other passage to which it may be compared, and which it closely resembles, is Romans 5:1-11. And it may be of interest to note that in both passages, and nowhere else, the same Greek words (*καταλλάσσω καταλλαγή*) occur in which the central idea of our reconciliation with God through the blood of Christ is expressed.

The entire passage falls into three parts: 14-17, 18-19, 20-21. Verses 14-17 speak of the love of Christ: His atoning death is the supreme manifestation of His love to us. Verses 18-19 show "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." Verses 20-21 entreat us: "Be ye reconciled to God." The meditation will lead to a threefold division: (a) the love of Christ; (b) the love of God in Christ; (c) the appeal of God's love in Christ to our hearts.

EASTER SUNDAY. THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

Epistle. 1 Corinthians 5: 6-8

Paul is writing in a rather severe tone. And he had reasons for it. The Christians in Corinth boasted of their superior knowledge. But there were serious defects in the church, even with regard to the moral life. The fifth chapter of First Corinthians deals with a flagrant case of immorality, to which the church was wholly indifferent. Paul calls upon the Corinthians as a church to take action with regard to that case. He wrote his letter in Ephesus, and he expects that the letter will be delivered to the Corinthians about the time of the Jewish Passover.

The references of the Apostle to the Jewish Passover are responsible for the selection of this lesson. If the lesson is used as text for an Easter sermon, the emphasis must be laid upon verses 7 and 8, in which the statement is made that "our passover also has been sacrificed, even Christ." This theme will justify the division: Therefore let us keep the feast (a) in Easter joy, (b) in Easter service (with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth).

Gospel. Mark 16: 1-8

Each of the great festivals of the Church Year has its own message. Easter is the royal festival; it is "the day of the Lord" in a special sense. And, therefore, it has a message that is fundamental. This message is expressed in the words: Christ is risen. Whatever text may be chosen, the resurrection of our Lord must be the center and heart of the sermon. There are reasons to believe that our Easter Gospel is the oldest account of the Lord's resurrection. It is, therefore, a most appropriate text, and it is written in that simple, but charming, style which characterizes the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark's story of our Lord's resurrection may be divided into two parts. Verses 1-4 picture to us the faithful women on their way to the sepulchre: their undying love for the Lord; the sadness of their hearts; their anxiety about the stone. Verses 5-8 have their center in the message of the angel: "Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen." Here we have the Easter message, which must be made prominent in the sermon. The significance of this message can be explained if the story of our Gospel is used to show: (a) What we would miss if Christ had not risen: His death would be the end of His life; He would not be our Saviour; we would have no hope; (b) what the Easter message really means: Christ lives; He is our Saviour; our faith in Him rests upon a sure foundation; we can serve Him in newness of life.

MONDAY AFTER EASTER

Epistle. Acts 10: 34-41

Luke has incorporated in the Book of the Acts several of Peter's sermons that are typical examples of the Apostolic preaching. In all of these sermons the resurrection of our Lord has a prominent place. The Epistle for the Monday after Easter is no exception. It contains the greater part of the sermon that Peter preached in the house of Cornelius at Cæsarea. The sermon, which gives a brief account of the Lord's ministry, is not only leading up to His resurrection, but also shows that the Apostles have regarded themselves primarily as witnesses of His resurrection.

Gospel. Luke 24: 13-35

The story of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus is a masterpiece of narrative, and an excellent text for a later service on Easter Sunday. By simply following the text, the story can be used to show how the risen Lord leads His disciples to a living Easter faith: (a) He draws near to them on their way; (b) He listens to their sad story; (c) He opens to them the Scriptures, and expounds unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself; (d) He reveals to them His presence; (e) He vanishes out of their sight; (f) He abides with them, and with us, forever.

QUASI MODO GENITI. THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Epistle. 1 John 5: 4-12

The first Sunday after Easter, also called *Dominica in Albis*, was of special significance for the Catechumens of the Church. Its Introit and name are taken from 1 Peter 2:2, the beginning of the baptismal lesson in the ancient Church. Tone and contents of our Epistle are in harmony with that lesson, as well as with the peculiar character of this Sunday.

Our Epistle requires close and careful study. It has a Trinitarian coloring; but the student should note that the words referring to the three witnesses in heaven (the so-called *comma Johanneum*) in vv. 7 and 8, are not genuine, but represent an ancient gloss. The student will also find it helpful if he will read the context and examine some of the fundamental Johannine terms. The leading thought of the text may be expressed in the statement that faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the source of a new life. This thought is developed in a twofold direction: (a) faith is a new birth; (b) faith is the power that conquers the world. Special emphasis is laid upon the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer, as well as in the life of the Lord. Water and blood (v. 8) refer to the Lord's baptism and His death: The Holy Spirit was present when Jesus was baptized, and by the power of the Holy Spirit He was raised from the dead. The Spirit is God's witness concerning His Son, and the same Spirit is also God's witness in us. He is the power of a new life, and, therefore, also the power that overcomes the world.

If we look upon our Epistle in the light of Easter, the following division may commend itself: The victorious life; it is (a) rooted in God, (b) faith in the Son of God, (c) the power that conquers the world.

Gospel. John 20: 19-31

The Gospel for the first Sunday after Easter relates two appearances of the risen Saviour before His disciples: the first, on the day of His resurrection; the second, a week later. It is advisable to treat them separately. If the first appearance is made the basis of the sermon, the center of the text may be found in the words: "Peace be unto you." It is significant that the Lord greeted His disciples twice with the same words. A study of the text will show that the first time His greeting is intended for the disciples personally (vv. 19-20), while the second time His greeting introduces the instructions which they receive (vv. 21-23). This would suggest a twofold division: (a) Peace is the Lord's own Easter gift to His disciples; (b) they receive this gift not only for themselves, but also for others.

The story of Thomas (vv. 24-29) is very rich and suggestive. It is the story of a man who had lost his way, but found his way back to the Lord. Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus came (v. 24). He had, for the time being, withdrawn from their fellowship. Why? The answer may be found in John 11:16 and 14:4-5: Thomas was sincere, but of a gloomy disposition; he wanted to be alone. But the disciples went after him; the Lord revealed Himself to him; and Thomas confessed: "My Lord and my God."

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI. THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Epistle. 1 Peter 2: 21-25

The relations of Jesus to His disciples were not only the relations of a teacher to his pupils, but also those of a shepherd to his flock. Peter has learned from the Lord Himself what it means to be a faithful pastor and shepherd. This is reflected in his entire First Epistle, which abounds in references and allusions to the Lord's example and His words. The Apostle is deeply concerned about the spiritual condition of his readers. He sympathizes with them in their sufferings, but he admonishes them to follow Christ's example, and bear their sufferings with patience. This is also the central thought of our lesson. Christians are followers of Christ. Suffering for Christ's sake is part of their calling. Speaking of Christ's example, the Apostle shows (a) that Christ suffered for us, (b) that He suffered patiently, (c) that He is now the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

Gospel. John 10: 11-16

The last words of the Epistle for this Sunday are an echo of the Gospel in which the Lord speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd, and this discourse of our Lord in John 10 reminds us of the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15. The Gospel is so clear and perspicuous that it is not necessary to go into details. It gives us an opportunity to lay before the congregation the entire work of the Saviour under the figure of the shepherd, according to the three chief functions of the Good Shepherd, which are indicated in the text: (a) He gives His life for the sheep; (b) He knows His sheep; (c) He gathers them into one fold.

JUBILATE. THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Epistle. 1 Peter 2: 11-20

The first two verses of our Epistle (vv. 11 and 12) are the introduction to the second set of exhortations (2:11—3:7) in the letter, in which the Apostle urges his readers to “have their conversation (general conduct and behavior) honest among the Gentiles” (v. 12). The next verse (13) is of a general nature, and the verses that follow apply the general exhortation to various human institutions referred to in verse 13 as ordinances of man. As such human institutions our Epistle mentions the powers of the civil government, and the institution of slavery. As the Apostle is writing to Christians who live in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, the “king” stands for the Roman Emperor.

The exhortations of our Epistle may be summed up in the words of the *General Prayer*: “That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” The text would justify the following division: The godly life of a Christian in this world: (a) its motive; (b) its norm; (c) its aim. Its motive is God’s love by which we are assured of our citizenship in heaven. Its norm is God’s will as it is contained in His Word. Its aim is the glorification of God’s name.

Gospel. John 16: 16-23

Several of our Gospels for the Sundays after Easter are taken from the Farewell Discourses of our Lord in the Gospel of John. As our Gospel is the first of these lessons, it is advisable that the general character and contents of the Farewell Discourses be studied before the exegesis of an individual section is taken up.

The keynote of our Gospel is joy. But it is a joy that is altogether different from the joy of the world. The disci-

ples shall experience that joy when they see the Lord again after His resurrection. But before their hearts can be filled with joy, they must have sorrow "a little while." Yet their sorrow shall be turned into joy, and their joy shall last forever.

As the experience of the disciples is the experience of all believers, the central theme of Christian joy, which is the keynote of our Gospel and also of this Sunday *Jubilate*, may be developed in a threefold division: It is (a) joy born out of deep sorrow, (b) joy in the risen and living Saviour, (c) joy that will last forever.

CANTATE. THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Epistle. James 1:16-21

The Epistle of James is the first in the collection of the *General Epistles*. It was written by James, the "brother of the Lord," who was at the head of the church at Jerusalem, and was highly respected by Jews and Christians alike because of his righteous life. The Epistle is distinguished by its deep moral earnestness, as well as by its simple, but forceful language.

Our lesson sets forth the central place of the Word of God in our lives. Of the many good gifts that come down from the Father of light, His Word, the word of truth, is the greatest and best gift. It is the means of our regeneration (v. 18); it has the power to save our souls (v. 21). What shall be our attitude to this "implanted word" (the λόγος ἔμφυτος)? First of all, we must receive it with meekness (ἐν πραύτητι δέξασθε, v. 21). Then it will bear fruit in our life. (The student may note the Greek word δέχομαι, which means "receive" in the sense of "welcome".)

Gospel. John 16:5-15

The last three Sundays after Easter look already forward to the Pentecostal season. The Gospel for the Sunday *Cantate* reflects this point of view: it has been selected because of its relation to the message of Pentecost.

The hearts of the disciples were filled with sorrow because of His statement that He would soon leave them. Yet Jesus tells them: "It is expedient for you that I go away." Whatever His departure may mean to Himself, to His disciples it is of great benefit and advantage (συμφέρει ὑμῖν v. 7): it prepares the way for the coming of the "Comforter." Two questions will arise: (a) Who is the Comforter? (b)

What is the nature of His comfort? These two questions are answered in our text. With regard to the first point, it may be noted that the Greek word for "Comforter" *παράκλητος*) may be translated also with "Helper" or "Advocate": it refers to a person who pleads and intercedes for another person. Our Gospel describes him as the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son. In regard to the second point, the Comforter's mission may be noted: He shall lead us to Christ, and glorify Christ in our hearts. The Gospel may also be made the basis of a sermon on the threefold office of the Holy Spirit: (a) to convict of sin; (b) to guide into all truth; (c) to glorify Christ.

ROGATE. THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Epistle. James 1: 22-27

This Epistle is the continuation of the Epistle lesson for the preceding Sunday. Both deal with the Word of God. But, while the Epistle for the Sunday *Cantate* sets forth the nature and significance of the word itself, our Epistle urges us to have the proper attitude to the word. What shall we do with the word? Of course, it is our first and primary duty to hear the word. But let us not be hearers only; that is to say: let us not be forgetful hearers. Let us be doers of the word. When are we doers of the word? There is one thing that the word demands of all hearers: Repent and believe. True religion is, first of all, a life in daily repentance and faith. Repentance and faith then lead to a life in holiness and love.

Gospel. John 16: 23-30

Rogate Sunday is the Sunday of prayer. The Lord's Farewell Discourse in the Gospel of John teaches us that a new epoch in the prayer-life of His disciples was to begin on the day of Pentecost. He had already taught them how to pray. In His teachings, recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, the subject of prayer has an important place. Some of the most beautiful parables deal with prayer, and are meant to be an encouragement to prayer. The disciples had received from Him that model prayer which is known to us as the Lord's Prayer. But there is something new to be revealed to them with regard to their prayer-life as soon as the promises connected with the coming of the Comforter are fulfilled: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father, He will give it you *in My name*." What is meant by the prayer in the name of Jesus? It is not a formula to which any magical

power is attached. The prayer in the name of Jesus is (a) the prayer of all who believe in Jesus as their divine Lord and King (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2 and Phil. 2:9-11). It is then (b) the prayer that is based upon the merits of Christ.

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Epistle. Acts 1: 1-11

Luke has recorded the Lord's ascension in two places: at the end of His Gospel, and at the beginning of Acts. That is significant: it expresses the two viewpoints from which the ascension of our Lord may be considered. His ascension into heaven is, in the first place, the crowning of His life and life's work on earth: having finished His work, He can now return to the Father. In the second place, His ascension is the beginning of a new and higher form of His life and activity, which will not end until He returns as the King of Glory to judge the quick and the dead.

Luke's account in Acts is very comprehensive; and as the language is somewhat involved, a careful exegetical study of the text should precede the meditation. We give a brief analysis of the passage. Verses 1 and 2 refer back to Luke's Gospel. Verse 3 sums up the Lord's relations with the disciples during the forty days after His resurrection. Verses 4-8 refer to a conversation between Jesus and the disciples on the day of His ascension "while he ate with them" (*συναιζόμενος*, v. 4). Verses 9-11 describe what took place on the Mount of Olives (cf. v. 12).

The essential features of our text can all be touched upon if we think of our exalted Lord as the King of Glory Who (according to the statements in the Nicene Creed) (a) ascended into heaven, (b) sitteth at the right hand of the Father, (c) shall come again with glory, and (d) Whose kingdom shall have no end.

Gospel. Mark 16: 14-20

The original Gospel of Mark breaks off with the eighth verse of the sixteenth chapter. The present ending to the Gospel (vv. 9-20) is an appendix, which was added to it

at a later time. The pulpit is not the proper place to discuss critical questions. However, the retention of our lesson as the Gospel for the day may be justified by the fact that its contents are in full harmony with similar statements, which are found in the other Gospels and in the Book of the Acts. Verses 14-18 have their source in Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23. Verse 19 is based upon Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:4-11. The statement in verses 15 and 16 is fully covered by Matthew 28:18-20. At all events, whether the lesson from Mark, or another passage, is chosen, our Lord's glorious ascension into heaven must be the center of the sermon on this day. And whatever the division may be, the sermon should make clear the significance of our Lord's ascension (a) for Himself, (b) for us.

EXAUDI. THE SUNDAY AFTER THE ASCENSION

Epistle. 1 Peter 4: 7-11

The Epistle for the Sunday *Exaudi* contains a series of practical exhortations couched in that warm-hearted tone which is characteristic of the entire First Epistle of Peter. These exhortations are introduced by the statement that "the end of all things is at hand" (v. 7a). The nearness of Pentecost gives all those exhortations a special significance, and this is true to a remarkable degree of the first exhortation: "Be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer." The days before Pentecost were days of waiting for the disciples. They were waiting for the fulfillment of the Lord's promises. Days of waiting are very often days of anxiety. For the disciples they were days of fervent prayer. But prayer demands concentration, a spirit of preparedness, of soberness, of watchfulness. The exhortations that follow have their center in the idea of brotherly love and mutual service. The passage closes with an impressive doxology. We prepare ourselves for the coming of the Comforter by a life (a) in prayer, (b) in brotherly love, (c) in mutual service to the glory of God.

Gospel. John 15: 26—16: 4

The name of this Sunday *Exaudi* has been taken from the first word of the Introit (Psalm 27: 7-9). It is expressive of the attitude of the disciples in the days between the Ascension and Pentecost. The disciples were waiting for the fulfillment of the Lord's promises. His promises culminate in the sending of the Paraclete. Our Gospel sets forth the mission of the Paraclete: "He shall testify of Me." But the Paraclete shall not be the only witness, for the Lord says: "Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with

Me from the beginning.” To understand the full significance of these words, we must know that there is an inner connection between the testimony of the Paraclete and the testimony of the disciples. In its last analysis, it is one and the same testimony: (a) *in* the disciples, (b) *through* the disciples. The Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, makes the disciples sure of the truth so that they can proclaim it in power (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5). This will also explain why they shall experience persecution: they proclaim the truth; the truth is the word of the Cross, and the preaching of the Cross is foolishness to the world (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18ff).

The heart of our Gospel may be found in the words: “Ye shall bear witness.” Undoubtedly, these words are primarily addressed to the disciples who had been with the Lord “from the beginning.” But the words have also a wider meaning. The true witness is the Holy Spirit Himself, and if we accept his testimony, which comes to us through the word, we shall also be witnesses. It is not only a duty, but also a privilege. But, in bearing witness, we must also be prepared to suffer for His name and His truth’s sake.

THE FESTIVAL OF PENTECOST. WHITSUNDAY

Epistle. Acts 2: 1-13

The Church's message for the day of Pentecost is based upon the Epistle rather than upon the Gospel for the day. [This message centers in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which marks a new epoch in the history of God's revelation, and the beginning of a new life for all mankind. Pentecostal sermons are, admittedly, the most difficult sermons to preach. Besides, the text itself presents peculiar difficulties. It is, therefore, important to note the essential points: (a) The attitude of the disciples (v. 1); (b) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples (v. 4); (c) the manifestation of the Holy Spirit (v. 11).

(a) The attitude of the disciples was one of prayerful waiting. They were waiting for a new revelation of the Saviour's glory, by which they were to be endowed with power from on high. They trusted in the Lord's promises, and prayed for their fulfillment.

(b) The disciples are not disappointed: the Lord fulfills His promise to them. He sends them the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of promise, of life, of power. He sends him accompanied by external signs. But He sends him into their hearts: the new life comes from above; it is God's creation, and it has its beginning in their hearts.

(c) The new life of the Spirit *begins* in the hearts of the disciples; but it does not *end* there: it breaks forth and manifests itself in the message which the disciples proclaim. They become witnesses, and speak in tongues "the wonderful works of God" (*τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ*, *magnalia Dei*).

Gospel. John 14: 23-31

The promises of Jesus in the Gospel of John culminate in the promise that He will send them the Comforter, the

Helper, the Advocate. That promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. For this reason our Gospel has been selected as the Gospel for the day. But the study of our Gospel has to take into consideration the preceding verses, especially the question in verse 22: "Lord, how it is that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not to the world?" The answer of Jesus makes it clear that He will manifest Himself to the disciples by sending them the Comforter. A comforter is a helper. In what way shall the promised Comforter help and assist the disciples? If we follow our text, we may point out three ways in which the Comforter shall accomplish his work: (a) He shall pour into their hearts a love that is greater than the love which they have now; (b) He shall fill their hearts with a peace which the world cannot give; (c) He shall give them courage to go forth and do His will.

THE MONDAY IN WHITSUN-WEEK

Epistle. Acts 10: 42-48

The Epistle for this day consists of two parts. The first part (vv. 42-43) is the conclusion of the sermon which Peter preached in the house of Cornelius at Cæsarea (cf. the Epistle for the Monday after Easter). The second part tells of the effect of Peter's sermon on those that were present: "The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." The entire scene is a repetition of the miracle on the day of Pentecost, with this difference that the hearers in the house of Cornelius are Gentiles. The lesson emphasizes the fact that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not confined to the chosen people of Israel, but is intended for all who repent and believe in the Gospel.

Gospel. John 3: 16-21

The third chapter in the Gospel of John contains the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus. The first fifteen verses of that chapter are the Gospel for Trinity Sunday. It is a question whether the verses that follow (16-21) are part of that conversation, and therefore *ipsissima verba Domini*, or a monologue of the evangelist. For the homiletical treatment of the text, the question is of no importance; for, in the higher sense, the words of the evangelist are also words of the Lord Himself. The first verse of the text is so comprehensive, and so well known, that it seems not necessary to make further comment on it here. But it may not be out of place to point to the close connection of this verse with the verses that follow. Faith in Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, is the door to eternal life. Eternal life is not only the believer's hope, but his present possession. On the other hand, unbelief leads to condemnation; in fact, it is condemnation already, because he who does not believe

has shut the only door that leads into light and life: he remains in darkness. Christ is the light of the world; He came to illuminate the darkness; but "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (cf. 1:5).

THE FESTIVAL OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Epistle. Romans 11: 33-36

The Festival of the Holy Trinity marks the end of the first half of the Church Year. If we look back upon the way that is behind us, we may well sing a song of praise to the glory of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for His wonderful works. Such a song of praise, a solemn doxology, we have before us in the Epistle for this day. It is the Apostle's response to God's plan of redemption and salvation, both with regard to Jews and Gentiles, as that plan has been unfolded by him to his readers in the preceding chapters of his letter. It is a hymn of praise to the glory of the Triune God, of whom and through whom and to whom are all things.

The Epistle rings with a clear Trinitarian note. But we must not overlook the fact that it is not the immanent Trinity, the mystery of the mutual relationship of the three persons to each other and to the one divine substance, upon which the Apostle meditates. It is the Triune God in His revelation to us, to whom he sings his song of praise. This indicates how our text must be treated. The Triune God as the God of our salvation is beginning, middle and end of all things. He has created us; He has redeemed us; He has sanctified us, and will also finish His work. From Him we come! in Him we live and move and have our being; to Him we go; so that He is all in all. We may recall, in this connection, Augustine's beautiful words: *Tu nos creasti ad te, Domine; et cor nostrum inquietum est, donec requiescat in te.*

Gospel. John 3: 1-15

The Gospel for Trinity Sunday is one of the most beautiful, but also one of the most profound and difficult, Scripture lessons. There are many roads that may take the traveler to Rome, and there are many ways in which this Gospel

may be treated. But the principal difficulty is to find a way that leads into the very heart of our Gospel. We have a conversation before us, and a conversation usually follows the laws of psychology. If we take this hint, we shall find that the conversation reaches its climax in verse 15, and is intended to convince Nicodemus that Jesus is the Saviour for whom his heart, and the hearts of many in Israel, had been longing. In the conversation itself, which gradually leads up to this point, we may then notice three stages of development, which are marked by three principal ideas: (a) the Kingdom of God; (b) the Spirit of God; (c) the Son of God.

(a) Nicodemus did not mention the Kingdom of God in his confession. Yet, the answer of Jesus shows that the thought of the Kingdom was uppermost in the heart of Nicodemus. God's Kingdom must come: is it already here? Is Jesus the one who was sent to establish it? Jesus replies: The Kingdom is here. But you will not see it unless you are born again, unless you become a new man (*καινή κτίσις*). The Kingdom is so near to Nicodemus, and yet he is so far from it. (Verses 1-3.)

(b) What can Nicodemus do to be born again? How can he become a new man? He can do nothing himself. God must do it all. And God will do it by His Spirit. The Spirit is the creative principle of all life: He makes all things new; He alone can give a new heart. It is true, He works in mysterious ways like the wind. But the new life of the Spirit is already here: the Baptism of John is a sign of it, and prepares for it. (Verses 4-8.)

(c) But "how can these things be?" To Nicodemus they seem to be irrational, impossible. But he is known as "the teacher of Israel" (*ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ*). Does he not know how the age of the Spirit is to come? Does he not understand the Scriptures concerning the Messiah and his work, from Moses who lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, to Isaiah with his picture of the Servant of the Lord, the Son of Man, who is also the Son of God? (Verses 9-15.)

The last words of our Lord are prophetic: they were intended for the future, and they have borne fruit (cf. 7:50 and 19:39). But the way into the Kingdom is always the same: Into the Kingdom of God by the Spirit of God; to the Spirit of God through the Son of God.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 John 4: 16-21

The first words of our Epistle ("God is love") are also its keynote. We may say they give us the Christian definition of God. Yet, they are more than a mere definition: they are the result of Christian experience, and that experience is the result of God's revelation itself. If we consider those words in the light of Christian experience, we shall realize that they are also the keynote of a Christian life; we shall understand what it means for a Christian to confess: God is love. An analysis of our Epistle will show that it means three things: (a) it means that we can love God because He first loved us; (b) it means that we can love God with a perfect love; (c) it means that we can love God in those who are our brothers.

(a) The natural man cannot, and does not, love God. How can he love God? He has never seen Him; he may even doubt His existence. In fact, the natural man hates God: he flees from Him. All this changes when we begin to realize that God first loved us. Our love to God is then simply the echo of God's love to us. God has manifested His love to us in Christ (cf. Rom. 5:8).

(b) There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). This eliminates all fear of judgment from our love. Our God is a consuming fire. But, if God is for us, who is against us? If we are assured of His forgiveness, we can love Him with a perfect love: we may have boldness in the day of judgment.

(c) The object of our love is God Himself. But we cannot see God. How can we prove that our love to Him is sincere? We can prove it by loving those who are our brothers because they are God's children.

Gospel. Luke 16: 19-31

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus belongs to a class of parables in which a lesson is taught in the form of a story. The difficulties connected with the interpretation of this parable have their source primarily in the fact that the lesson of the parable is not clearly understood. In several of our Lord's parables, recorded in the Gospel of Luke, the lesson is given in the form of a dialogue which concludes the story. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the dialogue between the rich man and Abraham is by far the most important part of the story, and it leads up to the words: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." These words are emphatically repeated in the closing statement of the last verse: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

There can be no doubt, then, about the lesson of our parable: it teaches us how to prepare ourselves for the life to come. Three points may be noted in our text: (a) There is a life to come; (b) the life to come is the result of the present life; (c) our attitude to the Word of God in the present life is the determining factor for the life to come.

(a) There is a life to come. "It is appointed unto men once to die." Death ends the life of all—rich and poor alike. But what after death? After death the day of judgment—when the soul is confronted with her God.

(b) "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (cf. Gal. 6:7). This law of nature may also be applied to the spiritual world. The rich man is reaping what he has sown; Lazarus also reaps what he has sown. Must we say, then, that character and conduct determine our eternal destiny? In a way, they do. But character and conduct are determined by an inner attitude of the soul.

(c) The inner attitude of our soul is determined by our attitude to the Word of God: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." Translated into the language of the New Testament, that means: We have Christ and the Apostles, let us hear them.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 John 3: 13-18

The particular message which this Epistle intends to bring home to us is similar to the message of the Epistle for the preceding Sunday. But there is also a difference. The keynote of the Epistle for last Sunday is contained in the words: "God is love." Our Epistle for this Sunday deals primarily not with God's love to us, or with our love to Him, but with the sincerity and genuineness of our love. Is our love sincere? Is it the real and genuine thing? The question is important; for there can be no Christian life without love. According to our text, we may subject the genuineness of our love to a threefold test: (a) The hatred of the world; (b) the supreme sacrifice of giving our own life; (c) the practice of our love in the duties of everyday life.

Gospel. Luke 14: 16-24

The parable of the Great Supper is like a beautiful picture in a beautiful frame. But the beauty of the picture will be fully appreciated only if it is looked upon from the right point of view. In following these suggestions in the interpretation of our parable, we may first consider the frame, then the picture itself, finally the viewpoint.

(a) Jesus is guest in the house of one of the chief Pharisees on a Sabbath Day. The supper is given in His honor. His parable of the Great Supper is a table talk. It has reference to the Kingdom of God. But the whole scene suggests to us the idea of the Kingdom as communion with God through fellowship with Jesus.

(b) In the parable itself we notice: (1) the kindness of the host who has prepared the supper, and sends out his servants; (2) the attitude of the guests, who had been invited, as contrasted with the kindness of the host; (3) the

invitation to the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind.

(c) We may take a twofold viewpoint of our parable: (1) the historical viewpoint, referring this parable to Israel and the Gentile world (cf. Rom. 9-11), and (2) the practical viewpoint, which applies the lesson of our parable to ourselves.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 Peter 5: 6-11

First Peter is one of the books of the New Testament in which Luther found the marrow and heart of the Gospel. It is a letter for the comfort and encouragement of Christians who were in suffering for Christ's name and His truth's sake. Our Epistle is the concluding passage of the entire letter: it sums up the preceding exhortations, and ends with a doxology. It may be divided into three sections: Vv. 6-7; vv. 8-9; vv. 10-11.

(a) The first exhortation ("humble yourselves") is closely connected with the preceding fifth verse: "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Lack of humility had been one of Peter's own chief troubles. His words here have reference to his own experience, when the Lord washed His disciples' feet (cf. John 13:1-17), and told them: "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (cf. also the significant expression in the preceding fifth verse: "*Gird* yourselves with humility, to serve one another"). Humility is the proper attitude of the Christian, especially in times of suffering; it is the result of an implicit faith in God's loving care (v. 7).

(b) Times of suffering are also times of temptation. Therefore, we must be constantly on our guard, that our adversary may not, in an unguarded moment, overpower us. Spiritual soberness and watchfulness are the best weapons of our defence. The Apostle refers again to his own experience: his words remind us of the words of the Lord in Gethsemane: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (cf. Mark 14:37-41).

(c) The concluding words of the Apostle (vv. 10 and 11) are more than a pious wish: they are intended to assure the readers of God's faithfulness. He has called them unto His eternal glory. He will also perfect, establish and strengthen

them. All they have to do is to trust in God's gracious promises.

Gospel. Luke 15: 1-10

Our Lord's attitude to publicans and other notorious sinners differed from the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes, the representatives of the religious class in Israel. They could not accuse Him of any wrongdoing and sin. But the fact that he associated with people who were despised as notorious sinners, was offensive to them, and called forth their severe criticism and condemnation. The three parables recorded in Luke 15 were spoken by the Lord to justify His own conduct: they set forth the reason for the Lord's attitude. The parable of the Lost Sheep is also given by Matthew (cf. Matt. 18:12-14). The parable of the Lost Piece of Silver is peculiar to Luke, but intimately connected with the first parable, and doubtless refers to the same occasion. The parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates the same general truth as the first two parables, but may have been spoken on a different occasion. Attempts have been made to distinguish between the lessons taught in the first and second parables. But these attempts belong to the realm of allegorical interpretation.

In the homiletical treatment of our Gospel, it would be proper to call attention to the Lord's practice of associating with sinners. His practice is illustrated and explained by Him in these two parables. This would then lead to the division: Jesus and the sinners: (a) He cares for them; (b) He seeks them; (c) He saves them.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Romans 8: 18-23

The eighth chapter of Romans deals with the new life of God's children. It is one of the greatest chapters in the entire letter, and it reaches its climax in the closing song of triumph in verses 31-39. Our Epistle is taken from this chapter, and it forms an integral part of it, although it is rather unique and stands by itself. It is one of the most beautiful and profound, but also one of the most difficult lessons. It throws an entirely new light upon Paul's personality. Rightly understood, we may say that it contains Paul's philosophy of nature. The great Apostle to the Gentiles was a world-citizen. But he has also looked upon the world of nature with a sympathetic eye. And this passage may teach us how a Christian should look upon God's world of creation: (a) he sees all creation in the bondage of corruption; (b) he hears in the voices of creation (in its present state) a sighing and groaning for redemption; (c) he believes in a new world, which shall participate in the future glory of God's children.

Gospel. Luke 6: 36-42

Our Gospel is taken from Luke's field's sermon, which may be regarded as a shorter version of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. It contains sayings of our Lord, which remind us of a string of pearls. We see the pearls, and we admire them. But where is the string, the golden thread, by which they are held together? We may find this golden thread in the saying of Jesus concerning the relation of master and disciple: "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master" (v. 40). A study of our Gospel from this center may lead to the following division: The Master and His disciples: (a) The

words of the Master ; (b) the example of the Master ; (c) the Master Himself.

(a) The words of the Master are words of practical wisdom for every man. Some persons think that similar words were spoken by other great teachers and wise men. However that may be, the uniqueness of these words, their singularity lies in the fact that they are words of the Master: His own words. In His words He reveals Himself to us. We are sitting at His feet, forgetful of everything else, eager only to listen to Him, to learn from Him. What does He tell us? Something infinitely great, but in the simplest form: "Be merciful," "judge not," "forgive," "give"; and all these instructions are brought into relation with God, so that we stand in God's presence as He is teaching us: Be merciful—as your Father also is merciful; judge not—and ye shall not be judged; forgive—and ye shall be forgiven; give—and it shall be given unto you. We feel: here is an authority before which we must bow down.

(b) But behind His words stands His own living example. We may say it is impossible to live according to His instructions. We may begin to bargain and bring down His ideal of life to our own level. Yet, *He* lived what He taught. There is perfect harmony between His life and His teachings. We consider His sayings in our Gospel, and compare with them His own life and conduct, and we must say: Here is a model teacher who teaches us not only by His words, but also by His example. Therefore, let us follow Him, and walk in His footsteps: *Verba docent; exempla trahunt*.

(c) The words of Jesus lead us to His living example. His example leads us to Himself; it leads us to the question: Who was Jesus? Was He simply a wise teacher, or the perfect man? No; when we listen to the words of the Master, we are confronted with the living Jesus who wants to win our hearts. If He once has our hearts, He becomes our Master, and we become His disciples, in the truest sense. Then His words also will become spirit and life.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 Peter 3: 8-15

The First General Epistle of Peter has furnished no less than six pericopes of the Church Year. As these lessons are taken from different parts of the letter, it is necessary, in each case, to study the context. We remember that First Peter is a letter of comfort and encouragement (cf. 5:12). In the general outline of the letter, we may distinguish several groups of exhortations. Our Epistle comprises the last section of the second group (2:11—3:12), the theme of which is contained in 2:13: "Submit yourselves to every human ordinance for the Lord's sake." This general exhortation is then applied to various human ordinances or institutions: (a) the civil government (2:14-17); (b) the institution of slavery (2:18-25); (c) the family (wives: 3:1-6; husbands: 3:7). These special instructions lead up to the exhortations in our Epistle: In whatever vocation or station of life we may be, we have all the same duties towards each other.

The greater part of our Epistle is taken from Psalm 34:13-17. The passage is not introduced as a quotation, but forms the very center of the Apostle's appeal. The first words ("He that will love life and see good days") sound the keynote of the entire Epistle. The Stoics promised their followers to teach them the true way of life. The Apostle teaches us a better way. He shows us: (a) in what the true way of life consists; (b) to what it leads. It consists in being of one mind, compassionate, filled with brotherly love, merciful, humble, peaceful. It leads to true happiness ("good days"), a clean conscience (v. 13), a life consecrated to the service of God (v. 15).

Gospel. Luke 5: 1-11

"The way of life" (cf. the Epistle) began for Peter when he became a follower of Jesus. Our Gospel, which has a

peculiar charm, tells us of Peter's experience by which he became a follower of Jesus. The mere fact that Jesus Himself called Simon Peter, has also been recorded by Mark and Matthew (cf. Mark 1:16-20; Matt. 4:18-22). But Luke is the only evangelist who gives us the deeper, inner motive that compelled Peter to follow Jesus, and become a fisher of men. Peter's experience was unique: he experienced in the presence of Jesus the presence of the living God. The first part of our Gospel (vv. 1-5) describes the way that leads to his experience. The second part (vv. 6-11) reveals the nature of his experience.

(a) Peter was no stranger to the Lord when the Lord entered into his ship, and "prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land." In a sense, he was already a disciple of Jesus (cf. John 1:40-42). But, sitting at the feet of the Master as He "taught the people out of the ship," his faith in the Lord increased to such a degree that he set aside his own experience as a fisherman, and confessed: "*At Thy word* I will let down the net." We see, it is the word that leads us to Jesus Himself.

(b) When Peter trusted in the word of the Lord, he experienced something great and wonderful. What was it? Our attention is called to the miraculous draught of fishes. But this external miracle was accompanied by an experience that belonged to Peter's inner life. This is made clear by Peter's own words: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." In the human person of Jesus, Peter experienced the presence of the living God: (a) in His holiness; (b) in His love ("Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men").

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Romans 6: 3-11

This lesson is of great doctrinal importance: it sets forth the meaning and significance of Holy Baptism. But it should not be overlooked that the Apostle's aim, in reminding his readers of their fundamental Christian experience, is altogether practical. The entire sixth chapter of Romans deals with the new life of the believer. The first two verses are its keynote. Here the Apostle raises the question: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" His answer is an emphatic "No." God's grace in Christ is the source of a new life. The believer has severed his connection with his former life. He was baptized into Christ, and that means, in the first place, a real union with the crucified Christ who died for our sins, that henceforth we should not serve sin, but consider ourselves dead to sin; but it means, in the second place, also a real union with the living Christ who was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, that we likewise might serve God and walk in newness of life.

The exegesis of the passage is somewhat difficult. But the leading thought of the text is the believer's union with Christ, which frees him from all obligations to sin, and results for him in a new life. This union is conceived by the Apostle as a real life-union, which is established by the believer's baptism into the death of Christ.

If we include in our meditation the first two verses of the chapter, and then treat the text in its wider scope, we may take as our theme the Apostle's answer to the question: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" His answer is: (a) We cannot, if we believe that Christ died for our sins; (b) we cannot, if we believe that we died with Christ; (c) we cannot, if we believe that we shall live with Christ.

Gospel. Matthew 5: 20-26

The term "righteousness" in the New Testament is essentially a religious term: it denotes the right attitude of man to his God. In the teachings of our Lord it is almost synonymous with "religion," or still better, "practice of religion." This is what Jesus means when He says: "Your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees." And as we read His words in our Gospel, we realize that His conception of religion differs materially from that of the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees were the most religious class of the people at the time of our Lord. They were noted for their strict observance of the Mosaic law in all its parts. But they were also self-righteous, and their observance of the law was a mere external thing: they observed the letter of the law, but not its spirit. Jesus teaches us that true righteousness is, first of all, a matter of the heart and of the spirit: to be religious means to be good, and we are not good if our heart is filled with anger and wrath towards our brother. The attitude to our fellow-man is, therefore, the test of our religion. If we are on the way to God, we must first be reconciled to our brother. In other words, Jesus knows no genuine religion that is not, at the same time, also ethics.

But this is only the one side of our Lord's idea of religion. Indeed, to be religious means to be good, kind, forgiving, forbearing. But Jesus does not stop there. He says: "*First* be reconciled to thy brother," but He continues, "And *then* come and offer thy gift." To be religious means to be good, but to be good means to serve God. Or, if we want to combine these two statements into one, we may say: To be religious means to *be* good, and to *do* good, for the sake of God who alone is good.

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Romans 6: 19-23

The sixth chapter in Romans deals with the new life of the believer (cf. the Epistle for the preceding Sunday). It is, from beginning to end, an urgent appeal to the readers to devote their lives to the service of the living God. In its last analysis, that appeal is based upon Christ's work of redemption. If we are one with Christ, the fruit of His redemption will be ours: we are no longer our own, but belong to Him who died for us and was raised up from the dead. Figuratively speaking, we have transferred our allegiance from one master to another master: formerly we were servants of sin, but now we are servants of righteousness. The service of sin always ends in death: sin pays to its devotees their due reward, and that reward consists in death; for sin and death are inseparably bound together. On the other hand, the service of righteousness leads to eternal life; for, as sin and death belong together, so righteousness and life are likewise correlatives. There is this difference, however, that while death is the reward, or the wages, of sin, eternal life is God's free gift of grace.

The student may note that Paul's figure, as verse 23 shows, is taken from the military life. The Greek word *ὀψώνια* (Latin: *stipendia*) is a technical term, denoting the soldier's wages for his service. The word *χάρισμα* is also used in a technical sense: it denotes, in the military language, the extra gratification (Latin: *donativum*) which a Roman general often paid his soldiers after a successful warfare.

The meditation may lead to the following division: The twofold service: (a) we are all servants; (b) we are either servants of sin or else servants of righteousness; (c) the wages of sin is death; the gift of God is eternal life.

Gospel. Mark 8: 1-9

The disciples of Jesus have preserved to us the picture of the Master in sketches from His life and ministry: either important words which were spoken by Him on various occasions, or single deeds of mercy. All His words, as well as all His deeds, flow from the same source; they bear witness to the fact that His entire ministry was a service of love, a giving of Himself (cf. Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). Therefore, wherever and whenever we see the Lord engaged in His work, we look into His heart. His heart is also revealed to us in this Gospel: (a) in His words; (b) in His act of mercy.

(a) His words ("I have compassion on the multitude," etc.), which are addressed to His disciples, are significant. It is not primarily the teacher who is speaking, nor the great prophet, but the faithful and merciful high priest, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities (cf. Heb. 2:17f; 4:15f). He sees the multitude, and His heart is moved with compassion: He feels with them, and for them; He enters into their misery, their God-forsakenness, their sin; He becomes their friend and brother. His words throw a bright light upon His whole life and ministry. Out of His heart rises a love that gives itself until the last drop of blood is shed for us on the cross.

(b) The heart of Jesus is so near to us in its genuine human sympathy. But His sympathy is not human alone; it is also divine. Human love and sympathy are powerless in the face of misery and sin. The compassion of Jesus overcomes all obstacles. But *how* does He help? He does not create something out of nothing. He takes the seven loaves that are there, and blesses them, so that they are sufficient for the four thousand. He also calls upon His disciples to assist Him; He pours His own love into their hearts, and through them into the hearts of others.

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Romans 8: 12-17

The lessons taken from the doctrinal part of the Epistle to the Romans require close and careful study: they are not what we might call "practical." But those who are not afraid to "dig deep" (cf. Luke 6:48) will be richly rewarded for their toil and labor. This is true also of our text: it is short, but exceedingly thoughtful.

The things of which the Apostle is speaking seem to be far removed from the modern mind. Yet, they are essential to a Christian life. They have reference to the Spirit of God in His relation to the children of God. The discussion of this subject takes up the greater part of the eighth chapter, and our Epistle is only a part—though an important part—of the Apostle's discussion. The Apostle starts out by saying that the believer is no longer under obligation to the flesh. For, although the flesh is still active in the believer, his life is not dominated by the flesh, but by the Spirit. It is one of the marks of God's children that they are led and moved by the Spirit. The Spirit is already at work in them. He assures them of their adoption, of their sonship (*υιοθεσία*). Having the Spirit of God within them, they stand before God as children stand before their father: not in fear of Him, but in the full assurance of His love; and this new relationship finds its natural expression in the Abba-prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven" (v. 15). The Spirit teaches us to unite in this prayer as God's children. Through word and sacrament, as well as through the inner testimony in our hearts, He makes us certain that we *are* the children of God. This assurance is also the ground of our hope; for, as the children of God we are also the heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

Gospel. Matthew 7: 15-23

The Lord's Sermon on the Mount begins with the beautiful Beatitudes, but towards the end we find impressive

words of earnest warning. Christians are in need of both: "goodness and severity" (Rom. 11:22). Our Gospel is taken from the latter part of the Lord's sermon, in which the severity prevails. Here our Lord teaches us the meaning of discipleship.

(a) If we want to be true disciples of Jesus, we must beware of false prophets. What are false prophets? They are, first of all, false teachers. But the exclusive application of the term "false prophets" to false teachers is too narrow. The words of Jesus: "By their fruits ye shall know them," leads us to the conclusion that false prophets are persons who are insincere in their religious life and convictions, persons who pretend to be what they are not. True disciples of Jesus are thoroughly sincere and in earnest about their religion: they practice what they teach; they live what they believe. (Verses 15-20.)

(b) The next verses (21-22) seem to contain a problem. We heartily agree with the Lord when He says that what counts is not mere profession of faith, but doing the will of His Father (v. 21). What is meant by doing the will of His Father? Verse 22 speaks not only of persons who confess Him as their Lord, but also of persons who have done "many wonderful works" in His name. Is that not in accordance with the will of His Father? The problem is solved in verse 23, especially in the words: "I never knew you." These words refer not to a theoretic knowledge, but to a knowledge gained by experience and intimate life-communion. True religion is life with God in Christ. True disciples of Jesus are those who know Him, and are known by Him.

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 Corinthians 10: 6-13

Israel's journey through the wilderness typifies the Christian's journey through this life; Israel's experience prefigures our experience. This is the general thought of the passage (10:1-13) of which our Epistle is a part (cf. for the first half of this section the Epistle for Septuagesima Sunday). In the meditation the five verses preceding our text must be included.

The first five verses of the chapter refer to the manifestations of the divine grace which the children of Israel received on their journey through the wilderness. The passing through the Red Sea is a type of Holy Baptism; the "spiritual meat" and the "spiritual drink" prefigure the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, although the children of Israel had been so richly blessed, God was not well pleased with many of them: for they were overthrown in the wilderness (v. 5). Here our Epistle begins: Israel's experience and example are a warning to us. Our journey through this life is also beset with many perils and temptations. These perils are (a) not imaginary, but real. Worldliness, lust of the flesh, pride of life, unbelief—all these things are just as real as they were in the days of Israel. Furthermore, (b) these perils and temptations cannot be avoided, but must be met. The devil, the world and the flesh, are the enemies of our soul; they follow us wherever we go. Yet, (c) although the perils and temptations, to which we are exposed, are very real, and very grave, they can be overcome. It will not do to minimize them, "lest we fall." But, "God is faithful": He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able. Furthermore, we have a faithful and merciful high priest who "is able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

Gospel. Luke 16: 1-9

The parable of the Unjust Steward is not only a *crux interpretum*, but also a *crux praedicatorum*. However, many

of the difficulties, which the parable itself seems to present, will disappear if we take into consideration the context. It will then be found that the passage 16:1-13 constitutes a connected whole. The parables in chapter 15 are addressed to the Pharisees (cf. 15:1-3). The Pharisees are mentioned again in 16:14. The intervening verses (16:1-13) are introduced by Luke as words of the Lord, addressed to His disciples. The *κύριος* or "lord" who commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely (v. 8), is therefore identical with the "rich man" in verse 1. In other words, verse 8a still belongs to the parable, and does not express the Lord's own judgment on the action of the unjust steward. It also follows that the lesson of the parable is contained not only in verse 8b, but also in verses 9-13.

The lesson of the parable is perfectly clear. The unjust steward acted "wisely" in his own way, and also in the opinion of his superior. God's children know a better and higher wisdom. They cannot serve two masters, but they are God's stewards in all things that pertain to this life. As stewards they must be faithful (cf. verses 10-12; also 1 Cor. 4:2). If they possess earthly goods (referred to as "the mammon of unrighteousness" because of the many abuses connected with it), they must use them to the glory of God whose stewards they are. This is true wisdom.

If the Gospel is treated as here indicated, the meditation will result in a sermon on Christian stewardship: (a) the meaning of it; (b) the practice of it.

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

The twelfth chapter of First Corinthians deals with the spiritual gifts, and their proper use, in the Corinthian church. Our Epistle is the opening section of that chapter. It gives us an opportunity to draw a picture of early Christian church life. To a certain extent, that is necessary if the congregation is to understand what the Apostle wrote to Christians who lived almost nineteen hundred years ago. But a thorough study of the text will also convince us that the differences between a church of the Apostolic age and a present-day church are, after all, not as fundamental as some of us may think. The forms may have changed: the essentials are the same. What are the essentials of a Christian congregation? Essential to a Christian congregation are, according to our text, three things: (a) The Holy Spirit and His work; (b) faith in Jesus the Lord, and confession of that faith; (c) a diversity of gifts.

(a) It is significant that the Apostle traces all Christian activities in the Corinthian church to one and the same source, that he regards them as manifestations of the Holy Spirit. This is essential. Christian life, in whatever way, or in whatever direction, it may express itself, is always spiritual life, and spiritual life is always created by the Holy Spirit through word and sacrament (cf. Luther's explanation of the Third Article in his Small Catechism).

(b) The principal work of the Holy Spirit is faith in Jesus as the Lord, and such faith at once expresses itself in a common confession of faith (cf. especially verse 3: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost"). A Christian congregation is, therefore, always a congregation of believers and confessors.

(c) The unity of a congregation lies in its common faith and confession. But that unity is a unity of divers gifts

(v. 4), administrations (v. 5), and operations (v. 6). The Church itself is a body with many members. But the body functions through its members. The members must, therefore, cultivate the gifts, which they have received, for the common good.

Gospel. Luke 19: 41-48

On this Sunday it was customary to read in the churches the story of the destruction of Jerusalem. This explains the choice of our Gospel, which otherwise would have its proper place in the Lenten season. Verses 41-44 are peculiar to Luke. Verses 45-48 have parallels in Matthew (21: 12-16) and Mark (11: 15-18). The whole passage is a most impressive lesson, which calls our attention (a) to the tears of the Lord, (b) to His words, (c) to His action. His tears signify His deep emotion: "He beheld the city, and wept over it" (*ἐκλαυσευ* denotes loud weeping). His tears are explained by His words, which testify to His undying love, but are also words of true prophecy. His words are emphasized by His action. His tears, His words, and His action, may be regarded as a mighty, final appeal to His people to accept Him as their Saviour ere the day of grace is ended.

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 Corinthians 15: 1-10

This lesson is known to every student of the New Testament as one of the most important passages in Paul's letters. It sets forth not only Paul's own conception of the Gospel (vv. 1-2), but also the common faith of the Church before him (cf. v. 3: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received"); in fact, the common faith of all believers. What is the Gospel? According to Rom. 1:16 and 1 Cor. 1:18 and 2:4, the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Why is the Gospel such a power? It is such a power because it is "the word of the cross," or in the words of our text, because it has its center in the message, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (v. 3). But Christ's death cannot be separated from His resurrection. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, we would yet be in our sins (cf. vv. 14-20). The resurrection of the crucified Saviour on the third day is, therefore, the foundation upon which the Gospel, the preaching of the Gospel, and our faith, must rest. The historical fact of the Lord's resurrection is firmly established by many witnesses. In the list of witnesses, which is given here, Paul includes himself as the last witness. He has in mind his experience near Damascus when the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to him in His full heavenly glory (cf. also his similar statement at the beginning of the ninth chapter: "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"). In these last verses of our text, the tone of the Apostle is especially warm as he refers to his own personal relation with the glorified Lord.

It is no easy task to do full justice to such a comprehensive and thoughtful text. If the entire Epistle is made the basis of the sermon, the eleventh verse, which winds up the Apostle's argument, should be included in the meditation. The

principal thoughts of the text (a. the Gospel as the message of salvation; b. the atoning death of Christ; c. the resurrection of Christ) may then be grouped under the general theme: Foundations of Faith.—A comparison between Paul, the greatest preacher of the Cross, and Isaiah, the greatest evangelist and prophet of the Old Testament, may result (in the light of Isa. 40: 6) in another division of a similar nature: What shall we preach? The answer would be: (a) We preach the Gospel; (b) we preach Christ as the center of the Gospel; (c) we are witnesses of the living Christ.

Gospel. Luke 18: 9-14

Our Gospel is a parable which illustrates, by a concrete example, the fundamental truth expressed in the first Beatitude of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5: 3). The parable is closely related to the parable of the widow and the unjust judge, by which it is preceded (Luke 18: 1-8), and it is also related to the parable of the importunate friend (Luke 11: 5-8). All three parables are peculiar to Luke, and deal with the subject of prayer.

The lesson of the parable is already indicated in the introductory statement of the evangelist, that Jesus spoke this parable "unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (v. 9). Prayer is, therefore, treated here not for its own sake, but as the most direct expression of our attitude and relation to God. The true spirit in which we must approach God, if we desire His favor and blessing, is the spirit of the publican, who was conscious of his own unworthiness, and simply asked for God's mercy. In the practical application, it must not be forgotten that our plea for mercy is based upon the merits of Christ.

If we bear in mind the purpose of the parable, we are justified to express the principal thoughts of the parable in the following outline: Man meeting his God: (a) Man on the way to his God; (b) man in the presence of his God; (c) man returning from his God.

(a) "Two men went up into the temple to pray." We should not question their sincerity. Nor should we question the fact that they are on the right way—the way that leads them to God. There is the same desire in their hearts, the same motive to seek the face of their God. The sanctuary is the place where God has promised to reveal Himself to His people, to assure them of His grace and mercy.

(b) Pharisee and publican stand in the presence of their God. What is their attitude? Here we notice a fundamental difference between the two men. This difference is already indicated in their external appearance: the Pharisee standing in a prominent place; the publican standing "afar off," in a remote corner. But it is fully brought out in their respective prayers. An analysis of the prayer of the Pharisee shows that, although he is standing in the presence of his God, he does not realize the holiness of God, nor does he realize his own unworthiness; he is not conscious of his sin. On the other hand, the publican's supplication is a simple touching plea for mercy. It is sometimes taken for granted that the publican must have been guilty of some gross transgression of God's commandments. But we know nothing about that. What we know is this, that the presence of God brings him to a realization of his own unworthiness and sin.

(c) If there is any doubt in our minds as to the proper spirit and attitude in which we must approach our God, we may listen to the words of the Lord in verse 14. This verse pictures to us the two men as they are returning from the temple to their respective homes. In a way, both are satisfied. But Jesus tells us that the publican alone received God's forgiveness, for which he had asked.

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 2 Corinthians 3:4-11

The first words of our Epistle ("And such trust have we") call our attention to the preceding verses. The "trust" of which the Apostle speaks, refers to his confidence, that he needs no letters of recommendation to, or from, the Corinthians: "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts" (v. 2), "an epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" (v. 3). This may sound like self-glorying. But our text explains in what sense the Apostle wants us to understand his words. Whatever ability (*ικανότης*) he may have as a minister of the Gospel, comes of God: it is due to the fact that God has given him such a glorious ministry (*διακονία*). In order to set forth the glory of his ministry, the Apostle then draws a parallel between his own ministry and the ministry of Moses. Both have something in common: else they could not be compared. To both, a certain "glory" is attached. (Note: The word *δόξα* always denotes the divine presence.) But, while the ministry of Moses, through which the law was received, was full of glory, the Gospel ministry is far more glorious: it shines with a glory that will not pass away. It is (a) a ministry that is based upon a new testament; it is (b) a ministry of the spirit, not of the letter.

(a) The Gospel ministry is based upon a new testament or a new covenant. It is significant that, while the Authorized Version has translated: "ministers of *the* new testament," the original is without the article. The absence of the article throws the emphasis upon the adjective "new" (*καινή*), so that we might translate: "ministers, or servants, of a testament (*διαθήκη*) that is entirely new." The meaning is perfectly clear: The Apostle contrasts Sinai and Golgotha. He has in mind the words of Jesus: "This cup is the new testament in (virtue of) My blood" (cf. 1 Cor.

11:25). In other words, whatever glory our ministry possesses, comes down from the cross of Calvary.

(b) The Gospel ministry is a ministry of the spirit, not of the letter: "for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (v. 6). The words of the Apostle have often been misinterpreted. But there can be no doubt about their true meaning. The law of Moses was "engraven in stones," but it could not give a new heart; on the contrary, it resulted for those who had transgressed the law, in condemnation and death. The Gospel ministry gives the Spirit, and the Spirit gives a new heart, and creates new life: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Gospel. Mark 7:31-37

In the Epistle for the day, Paul glorifies his ministry. Our Gospel brings before us a scene connected with our Lord's ministry; to be more definite: a scene relating to His ministry of mercy. Our evangelists have recorded only a limited number of His many deeds of mercy. But they have been careful in their selection, and it is one of our tasks to discover, if possible, the distinctive and characteristic features of each individual case. This task is comparatively easy with regard to the story related in our Gospel.

The man whom Jesus healed was deaf, and also had an impediment in his speech. There is no reason to doubt that Jesus healed other persons who were afflicted in a similar way. But Mark's graphic story of the healing of this man is distinguished by three characteristic features.

In the first place, our attention is drawn to the tender, affectionate, individual care of the Lord in dealing with this man. He took him aside; He put His fingers into his ears, and touched his tongue; He looked up to heaven, and sighed. We may ask: Why did Jesus do all these things? The answer is: They are intended to awaken in this man the desire to be helped by the Lord; they are to prepare him for the word by which his ears were opened and the string of his tongue was loosed.

The second characteristic feature of our story is the

word "Ephphatha." How strange that this single word, which means "Be opened," should have been preserved to us in the original Aramaic, the mother-tongue of our Lord! The reason is, it was the first word which that poor man distinctly heard and understood, the first sound that reached not only his ears, but reached down into his heart, and opened to him a new world.

Finally, we notice in our Gospel as the third characteristic feature the fact that the people, in spite of the Lord's instructions, not to tell any one, published His deed, saying: "He hath done all things well."

The three characteristic features of our story give us a new picture of our Lord: Jesus our physician who (a) draws us to Himself, (b) opens our hearts, (c) opens our lips.

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Galatians 3: 15-22

The issue discussed by Paul in this passage was of great importance to the Galatian Christians. To understand the issue fully, one should read the entire Epistle to the Galatians. Even then, it is difficult to make plain to present-day Christians the nature and fundamental significance of the issue involved. The Apostle speaks of the place which the Law had in God's plan of salvation. God's plan of salvation was realized in Christ. If Christ is our only Saviour and Redeemer, the question arises: Is faith in Christ sufficient for our salvation? The Judaizers, who were Paul's opponents in the churches of Galatia, said: Faith in Christ is not sufficient for our salvation, but faith in Christ *and* observance of the Law, to which Christians must obligate themselves by submitting to the Old Testament rite of circumcision. The entire Epistle to the Galatians is directed against that fundamental error.

Our lesson contains one of the Apostle's arguments. It discusses the relation of the Law of Moses to God's promise of salvation. The Law is God's gift; it expresses God's holy will. But the Law cannot set aside, or annul, God's promise of salvation. The promise of salvation was given to Abraham long before the Law was promulgated. This promise must be fulfilled. It may be compared to a testament (not "covenant," v. 15), signed and sealed by the testator, and therefore valid until it is executed. Christ is the executor of God's testament; for He is the One in whom, and through whom, God's promise of salvation has been fulfilled. The Law was made necessary by the transgressions, but it has only a temporary and provisional place. It is also inferior to the Promise in another respect: the Promise was given by God Himself; the Law was "ordained by angels in the

hand of a mediator" (μεσίτης). Finally, there is no law that can give life.

If we leave aside the historical conditions that are lying back of the Apostle's argument, the principal thoughts of the text may be summed up in the following outline: God's promise of salvation: (a) Given to the Fathers; (b) fulfilled in Christ; (c) meant for the believers.

(The exegetical difficulties connected with v. 20 will be solved if the term "mediator" is taken in the sense of "representative," referring to Moses and the angels.)

Gospel. Luke 10: 23-37

The parable of the Good Samaritan, which forms the main part of our Gospel, is peculiar to Luke, and belongs to the same general class of parables of which Luke has quite a number: parables that illustrate an important truth by a concrete example in the form of a story. (Other parables belonging to this class are: The Pharisee and Publican; the Rich Fool; Dives and Lazarus.) The parable itself, however, is linked to the story of a "certain lawyer" (νομικός: one learned in the law of Moses), who approached Jesus with a question (cf. also Matt. 22: 34-40, and Mark 12: 28-34). A third feature of our Gospel is the introductory beatitude (vv. 23-24), which has no connection with the parable, but belongs to the preceding section (10: 21-22). We may take up the study of our Gospel in the order just indicated: (a) The parable; (b) its framework; (c) the introductory beatitude.

(a) The parable of the Good Samaritan, unlike other parables, is noted for its local coloring: it tells of a man (a Jew) who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves. The priest and Levite were returning from their temple duty to their homes; their sacred calling should have made it the most natural thing for them to practice their religion when such an opportunity presented itself. The religion of the Samaritan was not without faults and defects. Yet his action proves that he understands the great commandment: Love thy neighbor as thyself. He

is really the "good" Samaritan, not because he is a Samaritan, but because he has acted in conformity with the will of God: "Blessed are the merciful."

(b) The lesson of the parable is applied to an individual case. The lawyer had approached Jesus with an academic question. Jesus turns that academic question into a personal question: We note the question of the lawyer in v. 29: "Who is my neighbor?" and the answer of Jesus in v. 36 (in the form of a question): "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?"

(c) The introductory beatitude must be explained in the light of the prayer and monologue in verses 21 and 22. The disciples are called blessed because they live in the Messianic time, and are privileged to see what kings and prophets desired to see: the Messiah and His works.

It is significant that this beatitude has been taken over into our Gospel, and thus has been linked to the story of the Good Samaritan. What does that signify? It does not signify that the parable of the Good Samaritan should be treated allegorically. But it may indicate that our Gospel, as a whole, can be treated in such a way that Jesus Himself is seen to be the center of it. He *is* the center. We are sitting at the feet of the *teacher* as we listen to His parable. We see in Him the *pastor* as we notice how He deals with the lawyer. And we cannot think of the Good Samaritan without thinking of Him as our *Saviour*. Truly: Blessed are the eyes which see the things that we see! We see (a) a wonderful teacher, (b) a model pastor, (c) a merciful Saviour.

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Galatians 5: 16-24

The Apostle's exhortations in our Epistle are introduced by the statement: "This I say then" (Greek: *Λέγω δέ* What I mean is this). This statement refers to the preceding verses, in which the Apostle reminds the Galatians that they were called to a life in freedom, but that this freedom must not be interpreted as unrestrained liberty or license; for, although Christians are no longer under the law, they live in the Spirit, not in the flesh. Our Epistle then sets forth what this life in the Spirit means. It is *toto coelo* different from the life in the flesh; in fact, the life in the Spirit and the life in the flesh are diametrically opposed to each other, and in so far as the lusts of the flesh are still active in the Christian, he can never be at peace with himself: "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." But the struggle with himself, in which the Christian is engaged, is not a hopeless struggle: by the power of the Holy Spirit, he can overcome the lusts of the flesh; in fact, those that are Christ's have already crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts (v. 24; cf. also Rom. 6: 6 and 6: 9).

If verses 13-15 are included in the meditation, the main thoughts of the text may be summed up as follows: The life in the Spirit; it is (a) not bondage, but freedom; it is (b) not peace, but war; it is (c) not defeat, but victory.

Gospel. Luke 17: 11-19

Luke has recorded in his Gospel, which some one has called the most beautiful book ever written, a number of stories that deal with publicans, sinners and Samaritans, and picture to us Jesus as the Saviour of all men. They remind us of the fact that Luke himself was a pupil of

Paul, and had the same conception of the universality of God's grace, as the great apostle to the Gentiles. Most of those stories are found in the large "Samaritan" section of Luke's Gospel (9:51—18:30). The story recorded in the Gospel for this Sunday belongs to that section, and its central figure is a Samaritan. He is not the "good" Samaritan; but we may call him the grateful Samaritan.

This Samaritan was one of a group of ten lepers whom the Lord healed when they implored Him to have mercy on them. He glorified God, and showed his gratitude to the Lord by returning to Him, falling at His feet, and thanking Him. Jesus was grieved and pained that none of the others returned. He expressed His disappointment. But He did more. In dismissing the grateful Samaritan, He spoke to him a word that throws an important light upon our entire Gospel; He said to him: "Thy faith hath made thee whole" (*ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε*). It is a word full of meaning, for the Samaritan as well as for us. It is, first of all, a word of appreciation: Jesus came to seek faith (Luke 18:8); here He found it. But we may question whether the Samaritan knew that his faith had made him whole. The word of Jesus opened his eyes: he saw a great light; he was introduced into a new world—the world of unseen realities, to which faith is the door. The word of Jesus is a word of appreciation; but is it also a word of wonderful promise.

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Galatians 5: 25—6: 10

The Epistle for this Sunday is closely connected with that for the preceding Sunday; in fact, it is its continuation, and therefore similar in its general character and thought. But there is also a difference, which is already indicated by the different words used at the beginning of each Epistle. Our English Bible has translated in both cases: "Walk in the Spirit" (cf. verse 16 and verse 25). But the original text has two different words for "walk": in verse 16 the word περιπατέω, in verse 25 the word στοιχέω. The word περιπατέω is very common and refers, in the metaphorical sense, to the moral and religious life in general. The word στοιχέω means: I walk in a straight line, in rank and file. Used in the metaphorical sense, it lays the emphasis upon our attitude to our fellow-Christians.

Our Epistle teaches us that, in leading a life of the Spirit, we must be guided in our attitude to our fellow-Christians by three things: (a) A spirit of meekness and humility; (b) a spirit of brotherly love; (c) the example of Christ. The first two points are clearly brought out in the text. The third point may seem to be not so clear. But it is in harmony with the general tone and spirit of our Epistle; it is underlying the other two points; and it is implied in the reference to "the law of Christ" in verse 2. The entire Epistle is a most fruitful text, and unusually rich in practical instructions.

Gospel. Matthew 6: 24-34

There are few lessons that will appeal more directly to the congregation, as well as to the pastor, than this beautiful Gospel, which has been taken from the Lord's Sermon

on the Mount. The student may be tempted to use only a few verses as his text, and inasmuch as the lesson is rather long and composed of several groups of the Lord's sayings, this seems to be perfectly proper. However, the prevailing tendency, to select short texts, and preach on them without taking into consideration the context, is not to be encouraged. And if we study our Gospel as a whole, we get the impression that it is, after all, a complete unit; in fact, we may say that even the preceding verses (19-23) are intimately related to it. Nevertheless, the beginner may have a little difficulty to find the central thought of the text. There can be no doubt that the Lord speaks of the ideal life of His disciples. But what is the nature of such a life? Verse 22 may give us a clue; it reads: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be *single* (*ἁπλοῦς*), thy whole body shall be full of light." This idea of singleness runs through our entire Gospel: (a) we must serve a single master (v. 24); (b) our hearts must be free from worldly cares and anxieties (verses 25, 27, 31), or in other words, we must trust in our heavenly Father with a single heart; (c) finally, we must aim at, and strive for, a single goal (v. 33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God").

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Ephesians 3: 13-21

The Epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul while he was a prisoner (cf. v. 13). The student of the New Testament also remembers that it is a circular letter, which was originally addressed not to an individual church, but to a group of churches. The letter is of great doctrinal importance, particularly with regard to the doctrine of the Church. But the doctrinal sections of the letter are interspersed with practical exhortations. The Epistle for this Sunday is the concluding passage of the first half of the letter. It is written in the spirit of prayer, and therefore especially warm. It culminates in a solemn doxology (vv. 20-21).

Our Epistle is comparatively brief, but very thoughtful. A careful study and meditation of the text will bring out one central thought, which was in the Apostle's mind when he wrote this concluding passage. Verse 16 speaks of "the inner man" (τὸν ἑσω ἄνθρωπον), and if we study our text from this center, we shall find that it is the *growth* of the inner man (or the inner life) which is the Apostle's chief concern. He calls our attention (a) to the source of all life, and of all life-growth: the grace of the Triune God (the Father with the riches of His glory; Christ dwelling in our hearts; the Holy Spirit with His power). He then (b) describes the nature of that growth: it is a growth in all directions (faith, love, knowledge), and therefore a normal natural growth. Finally (c) he shows us the purpose and end of that growth: "rooted and grounded in love" (v. 17), "filled with all the fullness of God" (v. 19); last of all, the glory of God Himself (v. 21).

Gospel. Luke 7: 11-17

The text of our Gospel does not present any difficulties. The story of the raising of the widow's son at Nain is peculiar to Luke, and is told in Luke's own inimitable style. Two features stand out most prominently, and attract our attention: (a) The Lord's deep compassion with the grief-stricken mother; (b) His almighty word by which the young man is called into life, and given back to his mother. Several minor features may also be noted: for example, the two processions meeting near the gate of the city, one headed by the prince of life, the other in charge of the prince of death; the effect of the miracle upon the people (vv. 16-17).

Critical and apologetic discussions of the story are out of place in a sermon. It may be emphasized, however, that the raising of this young man is one of the three instances in which the Lord has demonstrated His supernatural power over death. These instances gain a deeper meaning for us in the light of the Lord's own resurrection. If our Gospel is treated in that light, the words of the Lord, which were addressed to the son of the widow convey to us a glorious promise.

The second beatitude in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount reads: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Mourners are always with us. But Jesus, the Prince of Life, is also present wherever king death has his reign. The story of our Gospel is, therefore, deeply significant; it pictures to us *Christus consolator*: (a) His words of compassion; (b) His words of promise.

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Ephesians 4: 1-6

The Epistle for this Sunday is the opening section of the second part of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. While the first part of Paul's letter is chiefly doctrinal, the second part is predominantly practical; but its practical instructions and exhortations are of a more general nature than those in other letters of Paul, and they are related to the central thought and theme of the letter: The Church as the body of Christ. In accordance with this central thought, the first exhortation of our lesson ("Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called") is at once applied to the readers as members of the Church. Humility, patience, forbearance, a spirit of brotherly love and peace—these are the principal Christian virtues which they must cultivate and exercise in their relation to each other. In this way they will keep the unity (*ἐνότητα*: oneness) of the Spirit. This unity the Triune God Himself has created: for there is (only) one body, which is animated by the one Spirit who has called each and all of them with the same call and to the same hope; there is (only) one Lord, in whom they believe and with whom they are one through Baptism; and there is (only) one God, who, in Christ, is their Father, above all and through all and in all.

The connecting link between the first half (vv. 1-3) and the second half (vv. 4-6) of our Epistle, is the thought of the unity of the Church. If that thought is made the theme, we shall get a twofold division: (a) What *we* can do to keep the unity; (b) what *God* has done to create it.

Gospel. Luke 14: 1-11

Historically, our Gospel is connected with the Gospel for the second Sunday after Trinity: both have reference to

the same occasion. The Lord has accepted an invitation "to eat bread on the Sabbath Day" in the house of one of the chief Pharisees. Verses 1-24 tell us what was said and done by the Lord on that occasion. The supper was given in His honor. But His presence is abundant reward to the host who had invited Him.

The usual interpretation of our Gospel lays emphasis on the true observance of the Sabbath. But this interpretation does not bring out the real significance of our Gospel. A careful study of the text leads us to another line of thought. In the first half of our Gospel, the Lord Himself challenges the Pharisees by asking them: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" After healing the man who had the dropsy, He challenges them again by asking another question. In both cases, they are silent. And their silence is ominous: it betrays a guilty conscience; they must have felt ashamed. In the second half of our Gospel, we have what Luke terms a "parable." This "parable" was occasioned by the conduct of the guests. The Lord addresses His words to those guests. But His words are more than a bit of advice on social etiquette; they are a "parable," and therefore signify the proper attitude of those who desire to be guests at His great supper in the Kingdom of Heaven. Again, the guests, in listening to the words of the Lord, must have felt ashamed. The true significance of our Gospel, therefore, lies in the fact that the presence of Jesus (a) searches our hearts, and (b) humbles our pride.

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

With a single exception (Galatians), Paul begins his letters with an expression of his gratitude to God for the spiritual blessings bestowed upon his readers. In First Corinthians that expression of gratitude is particularly significant because it is at once followed by a discussion of very serious faults and defects in the Corinthian Church. This contrast helps to bring out the nature of those spiritual blessings with which the Church at Corinth had been endowed: they are entirely objective, and refer to things that are common to all Christians.

Paul mentions, first of all, the grace of God in Christ, as the source of all other blessings. In the next place, he speaks of gifts of grace (*χαρίσματα*), which have been bestowed upon the readers through the preaching of the Gospel (the testimony of Christ). Finally, he points to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (His *ἀποκάλυψις*), for which they are waiting.

The three things which the Apostle mentions in our Epistle belong also to us: (a) the grace of God in Christ; (b) the testimony of Christ; (c) the inheritance in heaven. God's grace in Christ is like an open well of living water, from which we may constantly draw. The testimony of Christ (or the preaching of the Gospel) is the means by which the grace of God is offered us, so that we may apprehend it. As long as we have the Gospel with us, the unsearchable riches of Christ are ours, and will manifest themselves in spiritual gifts and blessings. But the greatest gift is still before us: the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself on the day of His "*παρουσία*."

Gospel. Matthew 22: 34-46

This Gospel is taken from the Lord's disputations with the Pharisees. It is the purpose of the Evangelist to show his readers that the Lord is far superior to all the scribes and Pharisees, that He is in every way their master. For the practical treatment, however, this is of secondary importance. The real significance of our Gospel lies in the fact that it gives us an opportunity to set forth the difference between Law and Gospel, and the Lord's own relation to both.

The Pharisees ask the Lord concerning the great commandment in the Law. In His answer Jesus makes it clear that there can be no doubt about "the first and great commandment." But then He adds significantly that there is a second commandment of equal importance: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Theoretically, the Pharisees would agree with Him. But their attitude to Him proves that they understand neither the first commandment nor the second. It is not the theory that counts, but the practice.

But Jesus it not through with them. From the Law He turns to the Gospel, or to the principal question connected with the Gospel: "What think ye of Christ?" In its form, this is also, just as the first, a school-question. But there can be no doubt that it is the Lord's purpose to turn the academic question into a personal question. They know of His claim to be the Messiah. Now, then, if the Messiah is not only David's *son*, but also David's *lord*, that is, the son of *God*, they must make up their minds either to accept Him or to reject Him. The Lord's question is, therefore, an appeal not only to their reason, but also to their conscience.

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Ephesians 4: 22-28

Our Epistle begins in the middle of a sentence. It is, therefore, necessary to read the preceding verses in order to get the full meaning of the text. It will then be found that the first two verses of the Epistle belong to a paragraph (vv. 17-24), in which the Apostle addresses himself to the readers as former Gentiles, and admonishes them to abstain from vices and sins that were characteristic of their past life. The remaining verses of our text (vv. 25-28) then specify some of the sins, especially those that were often condoned by Gentile Christians: lack of truthfulness, wrath and anger, dishonesty, indolence.

The exhortations of our Epistle are of such a nature that we may apply them directly to ourselves. There is nothing extraordinary, or heroic, about the Apostle's exhortations; on the contrary, they deal with everyday duties. But is the way in which we perform the duties of everyday life, after all, not the real test of our Christian faith? If we want to sum up those duties, we may do so by making use of the Apostle's expressions: (a) "putting off the old man," (b) "putting on the new man."

Gospel. Matthew 9: 1-8

The story of the healing of a paralytic in Capernaum is recorded in our three Synoptic Gospels. A comparative study of the three accounts shows that they go back to a common source, which is preserved in the Gospel of Mark in its most original form (cf. Mark 2: 1-12; Luke 5: 17-26). We may, therefore, conclude that the story itself was included in the earliest records of the Lord's ministry, and that it was regarded as highly significant. The significance of the story lies in the fact that we are face to face

with the divine greatness of Jesus: God is present in Him, and assures us through Him of His own forgiving love.

The divine greatness of the Lord is brought out in our Gospel in a threefold way. We see it (a) in the power of His personality: Jesus is the center of a great multitude; they are drawn to Him; they have confidence in Him; they believe in Him (cf. especially Mark's account). We see it (b) in the words that assure the paralytic of God's forgiveness; His words reveal to us the real source of His power over men: the Son of Man has "authority" (*ἐξουσία*) to forgive sins; He acts in the name of God, and God is with Him; He is one with God. We see it (c) in the words by which the paralytic is restored to his health: the paralytic believes in the power of Jesus to forgive sins; his faith in the Lord is the source of a new life; this new life of the soul extends also to the body; when Jesus tells him to arise, he is able to walk and depart to his house.

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Ephesians 5: 15-21

In tone and contents, this Epistle is similar to the Epistle for the preceding Sunday. But there is also a difference. The emphasis in our Epistle is placed upon our Christian conduct with special reference to the world, and the time, in which we live. In view of the fact that "the days are evil," we are admonished to be careful in our life and walk. The Authorized Version translates: "See then that ye walk circumspectly." But the adverb *ἀκριβῶς* properly belongs to the preceding verb "see," not to the following clause (*πὼς περιπατεῖτε*). Moffat has, therefore, correctly translated: "Be strictly careful then about the life you lead."

The most important advice with regard to our life and walk is expressed in the words: "Redeeming the time." The word for "time" also denotes "opportunity" (*καιρός*). To redeem the time means to make the most of it so that we do not miss our opportunity. We make the most of it (a) if we act wisely, not thoughtlessly; the children of this world may speak of the Christians as fools; in reality, Christians are not fools, but thoughtful people, "understanding what the will of the Lord is." We make the most of it (b) if we use our time to cultivate and develop our spiritual life, to the praise and glory of our God, and in the service of our fellowmen (cf. also Col. 3: 16f).

Gospel. Matthew 22: 1-14

The parable of the Marriage Feast in the Gospel of Matthew is similar to the parable of the Great Supper in the Gospel of Luke (cf. the Gospel for the second Sunday after Trinity). But there is a most remarkable difference between the two accounts. In the first place, the parable in

Matthew's Gospel is entirely eschatological. In the second place, verses 11-14 in Matthew's Gospel, which speak of the man who had no wedding garment, are omitted in Luke's version of the parable. In order to avoid repetition, and also because verses 11-14 are the climax of the entire parable in Matthew's Gospel, it is advisable to make these verses the basis of the sermon, using the first half of our Gospel as the introduction.

The story of the man who had no wedding garment contains a problem, which may be expressed in the two questions: (a) How did he get in? (b) Why was he cast out? It would be wrong to say that he was an intruder, that he had slipped in although he had no invitation. Such an interpretation would be contrary to the preceding verses. The man without the wedding garment had followed the invitation of the servants. Yet, when the king came in and asked him why he had no wedding garment on, he was *speechless*, and his silence was evidently the sign of a guilty conscience. This indicates the solution of the problem referred to. His guilt consisted in having refused to accept the wedding garment that was offered him by the servants at the entrance to the banquet hall. The man in our parable had accepted the call of the Gospel. But he was not really Christ's own; he was not one of those "clothed with white robes"; he was still living in his sins.

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Ephesians 6: 10-17

Our Epistle is the closing exhortation from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. It is a magnificent text, which has frequently been treated in a series of sermons. Paul often uses figures taken from the military life. His travels in all parts of the Roman Empire gave him ample opportunity to observe the Roman soldiers, in their garrisons, in camp, or on the march. Here he gives us a minute description of the soldier's equipment, and then applies this description to the Christian. Briefly stated, he admonishes us to be brave soldiers of Christ.

Paul does not underestimate the enemy: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood"; Satan himself, and his hosts, are arrayed against us. Yet, we have nothing to fear if the Lord is on our side. Therefore he exhorts us (a) to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." The Lord Himself will protect us. He is ready to furnish us the weapons with which we can not only defend ourselves, but also defeat the enemy. We must therefore (b) "put on the whole armor of God": the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. If we use these weapons, we shall be able (c) to hold our ground, and stand firm in battle.

The meditation may result in the outline: "Onward, Christian soldiers: (a) be strong; (b) be ready; (c) be firm.

Gospel. John 4: 46-54

The Gospel of John deals with an early ministry of the Lord in Judæa, which is not recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. This section of John's Gospel (chapters 2-4) is introduced by the Lord's first "sign," and it is concluded by His

second sign: the healing of a nobleman's son. The first sign was a manifestation of His glory, with the result that His disciples believed on Him (cf. the Gospel for the second Sunday after Epiphany). The second sign is also a manifestation of the Lord's glory. But the characteristic feature in John's account of that sign is the development of faith.

The nobleman besought Jesus that He would come down and heal his son who was at the point of death. In a way, he believed in Jesus; but a faith based upon "signs and wonders" (v. 48) is only the beginning of faith. However, Jesus develops the faith of this man by telling him: "Go thy way; thy son liveth." He wants him to rely on the word, and the word spoken by the Lord is not without effect: it is a word of promise, and it fulfills its mission; relying upon the promise of Jesus, the man goes his way. This is the second stage in the development of his faith. On the way he meets his servants who bring him the news that his son lives, and when he learns from them the exact hour at which his son began to amend, his faith reaches its third stage: it is now a faith that is based upon personal experience (v. 53)—We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). But a life in faith is a growth "from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17).

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Philippians 1: 3-11

Philippians is Paul's great letter of friendship. It is a letter filled with joy and thanksgiving, and written in the most affectionate style. The church at Philippi had been founded by Paul, approximately in the year 49. The letter to the Philippians was written about ten years later, at a time when Paul was a prisoner in Rome. During those ten years, the intimate relations existing between the Apostle and the Philippians had never been interrupted, or even been disturbed. From the very beginning, the Philippians had shown a warm interest in Paul's labors, as well as in his personal welfare, and more than once had they sent him a contribution for the furtherance of the Gospel, as well as for his own personal comfort. All this is reflected in our lesson, which forms the introductory section of his letter. Even the expression: "your fellowship in the Gospel" (v. 5), may possibly refer to the gift of money which the Philippians had sent the Apostle, and by which his letter was occasioned, for the Greek *κοινωνία εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον* (v. 5) has the double meaning of "sharing in the Gospel" and "contribution for the furtherance of the Gospel."

Our Epistle is, first of all, a warm expression of Paul's gratitude to God for what the Philippians have done for him, and for what God has done for them. He assures the readers of his personal love, as well as of his confidence, that God will perform the good work which He has begun in them. The central thought of the text may be found in the expression "fellowship in the Gospel." To Paul this is the most precious thing in the world. Fellowship in the Gospel is (a) the source of all his joy, and of his heart's gratitude. It is then (b) the bond of love between him and his fellow-Christians. It is finally also (c) the ground of his hope and confidence.

Gospel. Matthew 18: 23-35

The parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18 was occasioned by Peter's question: "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" In His answer to Peter, Jesus made it clear that the duty of forgiving is boundless. Then follows this parable, which illustrates and explains what our Lord means. In a wider sense, we may say, this parable is an illustration to the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The lesson of the parable is so plain that very little explanation is necessary. Three points should be noted: (a) God's boundless love in forgiving our sins; (b) gratitude to God as the source from which *our* forgiving love must flow; (c) where such gratitude is not found and practiced, there God will deal with us not according to His mercy, but according to His justice.

To forgive those who trespass against us, is not only a sacred duty, but also a blessed privilege. God forgives all our sins unconditionally, for Christ's sake. But if we do not show the same spirit of forgiveness, which He has manifested to us, to our fellow-Christians, He will withdraw His mercy from us. Therefore: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Philippians 3: 17-21

It is a question who the persons were against whom the Apostle warns his readers in our Epistle. He writes with much feeling, and he refers to them as "enemies of the cross of Christ." He has told the Philippians about them quite often, but it seems that they had not yet made their appearance in the Philippian church. It seems likely that they were the same Judaizing opponents of the Apostle who followed him everywhere, discredited his work and his person, and had nearly succeeded in disrupting the churches of Galatia (cf. especially Gal. 6: 12ff). If this is correct, then the "belly" and the "shame," in which they glory, may not refer to their immoral life, but to the circumcision and the ceremonial laws of the Jews, which are also referred to by the Apostle as "earthly things" (*τὰ ἐπίγεια*).

If we bear in mind that the last Sundays in the Church Year are looking forward to the consummation of the Christian life, we may find the center of our text in the words: "Our conversation (*πολίτευμα*: citizenship) is in heaven." If we realize this, we shall cultivate a heavenly mind, which (a) is set upon heavenly things, which (b) follows the example of godly men, and which (c) looks for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel. Matthew 22: 15-22

Pharisees and Herodians were bitter enemies. But toward the end of our Lord's ministry, they became allies, and took counsel together "how they might entangle Him in His talk." They put a delicate and dangerous question to the Lord: "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?" But they find their master. The Lord simply points to

Cæsar's image and superscription on the coin which is handed to Him. Then He says: "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

The statement of our Lord is commonly understood to mean that the Lord wanted to show the different spheres of State and Church, and consequently wanted to teach that the Christian owes a duty to both. Jesus, in His statement, doubtless recognizes the authority of the Roman government. His words are the source of the famous passage in Paul's Epistle to the Romans (cf. Rom. 13: 1-7). But it must not be overlooked that the emphasis in the Lord's statement is entirely on the second half. What the Lord wants to say is this: Give to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; but do not forget to give to God the things that are God's. Here again, as so often in His teachings, the Lord turns a purely objective argument into an appeal that strikes at the conscience of His hearers.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. Colossians 1: 9-14

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians is written in the spirit of prayer and meditation: it is the Apostle's letter on the inner life. If this is kept in mind, the text will not be as difficult as it seems to be at the first reading. What we have before us is really an outpouring of the Apostle's heart, an expression of his prayer-life. All we have to do is to translate the words of the Apostle into prayer-form; then we shall be able to discern in them the clear outlines of a prayer that is almost liturgical in its general character so that we may call it a model "General Prayer."

The contents of this Apostolic prayer on behalf of the Colossians, and on our behalf, may be summed up in a threefold division: (a) It reminds us of the Father's mercy and Christ's redemption (vv. 12-14); (b) it calls upon us to walk worthy of the Lord, and be fruitful in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God and in all spiritual understanding; (c) it encourages us to look forward with confidence and hope to the inheritance of the saints in light.—It may also be noted that the lesson strikes the keynote of Christian hope, and is, therefore, in harmony with the closing season of the Church Year.

Gospel. Matthew 9: 18-26

Our Gospel brings before us a double scene, relating to the Lord's early healing ministry, and woven into one story: the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the healing of a woman who had been ill for twelve years. The story is found in the three Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mark 5: 22-43; Luke 8: 40-56). A comparative study of these accounts leads to the conclusion that Matthew and Luke are dependent

on Mark. Mark's account is distinguished by its vivid description: it is evidently based upon the earliest Apostolic preaching, and shows traces of a Petrine origin.

The homiletical treatment of the entire passage is difficult. It may, therefore, be advisable to divide the text into its component parts, and then make the story of the raising of Jairus' daughter the basis of the sermon. The following points may be noted: (a) The promptness with which Jesus is ready to follow the ruler of the synagogue to his house; (b) the words of Jesus: "The maid is not dead, but sleepeth"; (c) His words (found not in Matthew, but in Mark): "*Ταλιθα κούμ.*"

The passage as a whole emphasizes the miraculous power of the Lord. It was chosen as the Gospel for this Sunday because of its relation to the doctrine of the resurrection.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18

First and Second Thessalonians are probably the earliest of Paul's letters in the Canon of the New Testament. They are typical letters, with all the inimitable charm and attractiveness of Paul's wonderful personality. This is especially true of First Thessalonians. The first three chapters of this letter are chiefly personal. The last two chapters contain practical exhortations for the instruction and comfort of the Christians. We may divide those exhortations into general and special exhortations. The chief special exhortation concerns the ultimate fate of those Christians in the Thessalonian church who had fallen asleep. The Thessalonian Christians were worried about them. To understand the cause of their anxiety we must remember that the first Christians lived in daily expectation of the Lord's second coming (His *παρουσία*). Would those who had died not miss something at the Lord's coming? The Apostle bases his instruction clearly upon the teachings of Jesus Himself. There may be many things, with regard to the life after death, which we do not know. But there is absolute certainty with regard to those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and this certainty is the source of our consolation and comfort in times of mourning.

What do we know about those who have died in the Lord? The Apostle gives a threefold answer: (a) They are asleep in Jesus; (b) they shall rise on the day of His second coming; (c) they shall be with the Lord for ever.

Gospel. Matthew 24: 15-28

The eschatological discourses in Matthew 24 and 25 belong to the most difficult portions of the Lord's teachings. One of the difficulties, by which the student is confronted, con-

cerns the question whether the Lord is speaking of events that have reference to the near future, the destruction of Jerusalem, or of events that are connected with His second coming and the end of all things. In our Gospel the Lord clearly refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the events leading up to it. But these events are also signs of the end, just as the destruction of Jerusalem itself foreshadows the final catastrophe. However, we must be careful in our interpretation and application of the words of our Lord. The words of our Lord are prophetic, and the Lord wants us to read the signs of our own time in the light of the prophetic word. But no prophecy is fully understood until it is fulfilled. It is our duty to study the prophetic word without becoming enthusiasts or fanatics.

The signs to which the Lord refers in our text are of a threefold nature: (a) The "abomination of desolation" (cf. Dan. 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11): the desecration of the temple (idolatrous practices in the very place where God is to be worshiped; cf. also 2 Thess. 2:3f); (b) great tribulation, persecution and distress; (c) the appearance of false prophets and false Christs.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 2 Peter 3: 3-14

The Epistle for this Sunday is taken from Second Peter (cf. Epistle for Transfiguration). It deals with the second coming of our Lord. The Apostle directs his remarks against those skeptics and heretics that arose in the Church toward the end of the Apostolic Age, and scoffed at the idea of the Lord's second coming. He replies to their objections, calls attention to similar conditions at Noah's time, refers to the Lord's own word, that His day will come as a thief in the night, and admonishes his readers to be diligent that they may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

Three important things may be noted in the Apostle's discussion concerning the Lord's Day (His *παρουσία*): (a) The Day of the Lord will come surely; (b) the Day of the Lord will come unexpectedly; (c) the Day of the Lord will be a day of judgment and of redemption.

Second Epistle. 2 Thessalonians 1: 3-10

The *Common Service Book* gives as the second Epistle for this Sunday the opening section of Second Thessalonians. There is a remarkable resemblance between this section and the corresponding section in First Thessalonians. But the passage in Second Thessalonians, besides expressing the Apostle's gratitude for the faith and love of the readers, has a decidedly apocalyptic coloring: it draws a vivid picture of the Lord's glorious coming to judge the quick and the dead.

Gospel. Matthew 25: 31-46

The Gospel of Matthew contains five large groups of the Lord's sayings, in all of which the Kingdom of Heaven is

the central idea. (a) The righteousness of the Kingdom (5-7); (b) its expansion (10); (c) its nature (13); (d) its members (18); (e) its consummation (24-25). Our impressive and beautiful Gospel for this Sunday is the concluding section in the last of these five groups: it pictures in vivid colors the final scene on the day of judgment. If we compare this concluding section with the opening section in the first group (the Beatitudes), we have before us two samples of the Lord's teachings, which have no equal anywhere.

For the practical treatment, the following points may be noted: (a) The Son of Man (the Messiah-King) is sitting upon the throne of His glory, surrounded by all the holy angels, and also by those who are later (v. 40, and again v. 46) referred to by Him as "these My brethren," to mete out the final judgment; (b) those who are gathered before Him, to receive from Him their reward, are designated as "all nations" (*πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*): these evidently do not include the members of the Kingdom, referred to as "these My brethren"; (c) before the judgment is pronounced a separation takes place between the "sheep" and the "goats," the righteous and the unrighteous; (d) the standard of judgment is not repentance and faith (as in the case of the believers), but the respective attitude of those two groups to the great commandment of love, especially with regard to those who are His brethren.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Epistle. 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

The Epistle for this last Sunday of the Church Year is the direct continuation of the Epistle for the twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity: it has reference to the second coming of our Lord, and the Apostle's remarks on this point are intended for the further instruction and comfort of the Thessalonian Christians. The preceding passage deals with the *manner* of His coming. In this passage the Apostle discusses the *time* of His coming. At the outset, he refers briefly to very definite instructions, which the Thessalonians had received from him. The contents of our Epistle make it clear to us that those instructions were based upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Himself. He reminds them especially of a saying of Jesus (Matt. 24:42-44), that "the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night." It is, therefore, idle speculation to ask *when* the Lord will come. The important thing is that we are prepared for His coming.

Spiritual preparedness is the keynote of our text. We know that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly. It therefore behooves us (a) to be sober and watchful, (b) to walk as the children of the day, (c) to continue steadfast in faith, love and hope, so that we may obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, "who died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."—It may be noted that the Apostle's exhortations in our Epistle are similar to his exhortations in the Epistle for the first Sunday in Advent. The Church's message is essentially one: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

Gospel. Matthew 25: 1-13

The parable of the Ten Virgins is peculiar to Matthew, although Luke may have alluded to it in 13:23-30. It is

one of the most beautiful and instructive parables, but also one that has been misinterpreted by commentators who are devoted to the allegorizing method.

The Lord describes in vivid colors a popular scene: a bridal procession. Ten maidens, friends of the bride, have gone out to meet the bridegroom. In accordance with the custom of the times, they carry lighted lamps in their hands. At an appointed place they stop and wait for the bridegroom. The bride is not mentioned: she is already in the house where the wedding is to take place. The bridegroom does not arrive at once; and as it is late in the evening, "they all slumbered and slept." At midnight there is a cry: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh." Then five of the virgins notice that their lamps are about to go out: they have forgotten to fill their vessels with sufficient oil. Upon the advice of the others, they hasten to the nearest dealer to replenish their supply. But while they are away, the bridegroom arrives. Later, when they knock at the door, they are told that the bridegroom does not know them: they have come too late.

The parable clearly teaches the lesson of preparedness, nothing else. Moreover, the lesson is expressly stated in verse 13: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." Those who expect to enter into the Kingdom of heaven must be ready at any time. He who is not prepared, or only partly prepared, may find himself excluded at the end, just as the five virgins in the parable were excluded from the wedding feast.

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